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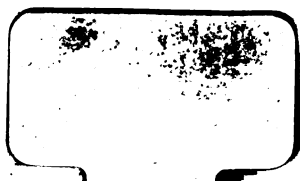
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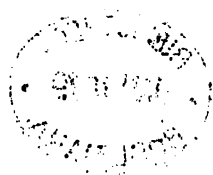
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HELENA  
LADY HARROGATE



# HELENA LADY HARROGATE

A Tale

BY  
JOHN BERWICK HARWOOD

AUTHOR OF 'LADY FLAVIA'

IN THREE VOLUMES.—VOL. I



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**Bungee**

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# HELENA, LADY HARROGATE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THREATENED.

“No, my Lord, I do not know him; nor, I think, does any one in the village. But during the few weeks that I have been at High Tor Churchtown I have seen him very often indeed.”

The speaker was a young girl, of some twenty years at most. Her bearing was grave and modest, and her attire scrupulously plain; but there are cases in which sovereign beauty will assert herself, and Ethel Gray, the newly-appointed school-mistress,



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h he was patron. But they  
ore seen the shrewd rugged  
he middle-aged member of  
Right Hon. Stephen Ham-  
secretary of State, by whom  
anned.

w words had been uttered in  
quiry from the Earl as to a  
of sinister aspect and powerful  
lounge near the low gate of  
the garden.

ot a face," said the Earl, think-  
sessions, tramps, gipsies, and  
which I am pleased to see  
y good people.—What is your  
mond, of the owner of it?"

that I had rather not meet him  
night," answered the Under-  
a smile. "But perhaps, after  
is only some sailor newly paid

off; though he has a reckless unpleasant look, in any case."

Perceiving himself to be an object of attention to the occupants of the school-room window, the rough fellow who had been lingering at the gate now turned on his heel, and with an air half-defiant, half-abashed, slunk away.

Nor was it long before the old Earl and his guest, with an urbane word or two of leave-taking to the pretty teacher, quitted the school, and re-entered the carriage, which had been awaiting them in the leafy lane beyond. Lord Wolverhampton, as the horses' heads were turned towards High Tor, looked and felt pleased. He took an interest in the schools, as he did in every detail of his property; and he had been anxious for the Under-secretary's approbation concerning them. The Right Hon. Stephen Hammond



had, in the course of the tour which he was hurriedly making through the country, visited many such places of education, probably with a view to Hansard and Blue-books ; but he was frankly willing to give its meed of praise to that of which his noble host was the patron. And praise from Mr. Hammond was worth the having.

The carriage rolled on between high banks crested with hazels and gay with wild-flowers, until at last it passed between the sturdy gate-posts of blue Cornish granite, topped by the grim heraldic monsters which the De Veres had borne on their shields in battle for many a year before they had become possessed of the ancient barony of Harrogate or the modern earldom of Wolverhampton. It was a pretty park enough that of High Tor, with its huge sycamores and avenue of wych-elms, the fallow-deer feeding

peacefully among the ancient hawthorn trees, the tinkling trout-stream, and the lofty crag that stood forth like a giant sentinel, as though to protect the mansion itself, surrounded by its gardens and shrubberies.

"Those are fine beeches!" observed Mr. Hammond, pointing to a clump of silvan Titans that reared their canopy of leaves on a hill far away.

"Ah!" said the Earl, as a momentary shade passed across his face; "those are not on my land. They are on the other side of the ring-fence, and belong to Sir Sykes, at Carbery Chase."

"It was all one property once, I think?" said Mr. Hammond.

"Yes; but that was a long time ago," rejoined the Earl; but he did not enlarge upon the subject, and the carriage rolled in silence along the well-kept road towards the house.

Meanwhile the man whose loitering near the school of High Tor had attracted some notice had cleared the village, and was traversing one of those deep lanes, with high banks densely wooded, for which that southern county is famous. The nut boughs almost interlaced their slender branches over his head as he passed beneath their shadow, and the ferns grew so thickly that it was but here and there, in golden patches, that the broken sunbeams could filter through them. The wayfarer was, however, to judge from appearances, by no means one of those for whom the coy beauty of wild-flowers, or the soft greenery of the wood-lands, or the carol of the birds, could have any peculiar attraction. He pushed on, not hurrying his pace, but moodily indifferent to the hundred pretty sights and sounds that vainly invited his attention.

In person the stranger was, as has been mentioned, powerfully built, and still active and vigorous, although his crisp dark hair was grizzled by age or hardship. His keen restless eyes, sullen mouth, and lowering looks, were scarcely calculated to inspire confidence. His sunburnt face had evidently known the heat of a fiercer sun than that of Britain; and near the corner of the mouth there was a dull white scar, half hidden by the clustering beard. Mr. Hammond's conjecture as to the seafaring character of the man was perhaps warranted by his attire, which was of a coarse blue pilot-cloth, such as is worn not by sailors only, but by many dwellers on the coast, whose calling leads them to associate with mariners; and as regarded his bearing, he might as easily have been taken for an Australian digger or Cornish miner as for a seaman.

Such as he was, Ethel Gray was right in saying that this man's darkling face had been very frequently to be seen in the village of High Tor during the few weeks of her residence there. Who he was or whence he came, no one knew. But he did nothing illegal in loitering about the trim straggling street; and as our modern system does not encourage rural Dogberries to meddle with suspected 'vagrom men,' he was left practically unmolested as he lounged to and fro, talking little, but listening much in the tap-room of the village ale-house, where the rustics recognised in him the merit of one who carried spare silver in his pocket, and would invest a little of it in eleemosynary pots of beer. Himself not over-communicative, he seemed to have an aptitude for making others talk; and if to learn the politics of the parish was his desire, he

certainly ought to have become tolerably well versed in them.

The swarthy, slouching fellow trudged on, indifferent to the pale blush of the wild-roses, to the scent of the violets, or to the fresh clear song of the blackbird. He was thinking, thinking deeply, perceptibly indeed, had any one been there to watch him, for the veins and muscles of his beetling brows swelled and rose frowningly, as they do with some men while racking their brains. Presently he emerged into a broader and drier road than the moist shady lane which he had traversed, and saw before him the lodge-gates of a park, the stone piers of which were surmounted by a pair of couchant greyhounds in marble. One of the side-gates stood always open, since there exists an ancient right of way through Carbery Chase ; and unchallenged, the stranger passed through

the gateway and entered the demesne. It was a fair scene on which he looked. The golden sunshine fell, as if lovingly, on the rustling beech-trees and spreading oaks, the ferny dells and grassy uplands, the ancient trees of the grand avenue, and the bold blue swell of Dartmoor rising bleakly to the northward.

Full in front, seen through a vista of lofty elms, was the great house, rising stately in its fair proportions; mullion and ogive, and gable and turret, and every detail, to the very vanes that flashed and glittered on roof and tower, looking very much as they must have looked when Queen Elizabeth deigned to show her skill as an archeress, to the detriment of the dappled deer in the wide park beyond. The silver-plumaged swans yet rode the tranquil waters of the mere, the burnished pheasants exhibited

their gaudy feathers on the sunny bank beneath the fir-spinny, and the peacocks swept their gorgeous trains along the stone terrace that skirted the house, as when Tudor royalty had been feasted there.

It is seldom in England that two mansions of pretensions equal to High Tor and Carbery Court lie so near together. But in point of splendour there could be no comparison between the two. The grand Elizabethan house, justly described in the red-bound county guide-book as 'a magnificent place, now the seat of Sir Sykes Denzil, Bart.,' far surpassed in size and in symmetry the smaller and older dwelling of Sir Sykes's noble neighbour. No one would have credited the sunburnt stranger with any great share of artistic taste or architectural interest, yet he stood still at an angle of the road whence he could command



an uninterrupted view of Carbery Court, and shading his eyes with his broad hand, gazed at it with an intentness that was not a little remarkable. "A tidy crib!" he muttered at last. "No wonder if a chap would run a bit of risk, and pitch overboard any ballast in the way of scruples, to be owner of such a place as that. And yet"——

He snapped his fingers contemptuously as he spoke, but nevertheless broke off abruptly in his soliloquy, and drawing out from the breast-pocket of his rough coat a leathern tobacco-pouch and a short clay pipe, filled and lighted the latter, and leaning against the huge bole of an elm-tree, smoked for some time in silence. But if his outspoken self-communings had come to an end, it would seem that the train of thought which had suggested them had sustained no interruption, to judge by the stealthy glances

which he cast now and again towards the grand mansion, flanked as it was by all the appliances of wealth — park and lake and gardens, home-farm and stabling, pheasantry, and paddocks where thoroughbred colts disported themselves during the brief period of liberty that precedes the education of such equine aristocrats.

A stray policeman passing by would probably have set down the swarthy stranger as an intending burglar taking a distant survey of the scene of his projected operations; but the mixture of emotions which the man's callous face expressed was of by far too complex a character to be summed up in so commonplace a fashion. There was covetousness to be sure, and perhaps a spice of malignity; but what appeared to predominate was a species of cynical enjoyment of the thinker's own cunning, not unusual

with crafty but uneducated persons, who see themselves on the brink of success. Whatever might be the nature of the man's meditations, they were presently cut short by the sound of hoofs on the smooth road near him, as a gentleman riding slowly from the lodge-gates towards the house came in sight.

As the rider approached him, the man, who had been leaning against the tree, started, and with an impatient gesture, knocked the ashes out of his exhausted pipe; then jerking down his hat over his brows with the air of one whose instinct or purpose it is to shun observation, he strode off, striking into a side-road which led towards another gate of the park, by which entrance could be made from the northward. Some minutes of brisk walking brought him to the verge of the park, whence he emerged into a wild

and broken district of imperfectly cultivated country lying at the foot of the Dartmoor uplands, that rolled away in front of him to the edge of the horizon.

For some half a mile beyond the park-wall, the well-tilled fields, the fences in good repair, and the trim aspect of the few dwellings that studded the country, differed in no respect from such fields and fences, such farms and cottages as lay between High Tor and Carbery. But when the pedestrian reached a guide-post, the pointing finger of which was inscribed with the words, 'To Nomansland, Dedman's Hollow, and Dartmoor,' he began to see before him evidences that he had left behind him the carefully managed Carbery property, and had entered on a barren region skirting the Royal Forest, and inhabited by a race of squatters who wrested with diffi-

culty a bare subsistence from the sterile soil.

45- Passing on amid the ragged hedges, the lean cattle, squalid children, and tumble-down hovels of this unattractive population, but acknowledging twice or thrice a half sullen nod or growl of recognition on the part of some male member of the community who stood whistling or chewing a straw at gate or gap, the wayfarer at last reached a spot where, at the junction of four narrow lanes, stood a dilapidated house of entertainment, its thatched roof stained and broken, and with not a few of the panes in its unwashed windows rudely replaced by boards or sackcloth. An inscription in faded letters over the low-browed doorway had reference to a license to retail beer and spirits for consumption on the premises, and tobacco ; while a board nailed to a dead tree

hard by bore, in thin black characters, the name of *The Traveller's Rest*. And into *The Traveller's Rest* the stranger dived, with all the air of one who feels himself at home.

## CHAPTER II.

### AT CARBERY CHASE.

THE horseman, at whose approach the interesting inmate of *The Traveller's Rest* had so abruptly withdrawn from the place of observation whence he was contemplating the Elizabethan front of Carbery Court, had scarcely recognised in the lounge smoking his pipe beneath the elm, the bronzed sea-faring fellow whom he had frequently of late encountered. But as the man moved off with hasty step and an evident dislike to observation, the rider's eyes for a moment followed him.

"A queer customer that," he said carelessly to himself. "What is he, I wonder?"

If I saw that ugly face of his near Ashdown Park or Newmarket, Heath, I'd lay a trifle that he was a racing tout; in London I would class him as a dog-dealer or a dog-stealer, or possibly a sham smuggler, one of those gruff longshore-men who waylay you with their contraband cabbage-leaf *Trabucos*; but, being here, I think he has more the look of a real one."

Having said which, he rode on, in the quiet enjoyment of a cigar, towards the material of which it is unlikely that the leaf of any British vegetable had contributed; while no sound but the jingling of the bridle-rein and the tramp of the horse's feet broke the silence. Overhead there soared aloft a living canopy of verdure, formed by the mighty trees, that seemed to throw, as it were, a succession of triumphal arches over the smooth carriage-road,



flecked with broad bars of light and shadow. There were vistas here and there, opening out from between the massive trees, on which an artist's eye might have feasted, dells clothed with beech and birch trees, fairy glens through which trickled some brooklet fresh from its cradle among the ridges of Dartmoor, pools on which the water-lily floated, and around which the deer bent down their antlered heads to drink. But Jasper Denzil had little or no appreciation of the charms of a landscape, and as he rode on, the only comment which escaped him was evoked by the sight of the superb old house, its many windows glistening golden in the sloping sun, as though to challenge admiration.

"Tiresome old jail!" he said, tossing away the stump of his cigar. "A nice place to be mewed up in, with the London

season at high-pressure, is this ! If it were mine to do as I liked with"— But the only son and heir of Sir Sykes Denzil did not definitely state the course that he should pursue were he undisputed proprietor of Carbery Chase.

Jasper, whose actual age may have been six or at the most seven-and-twenty, was one of those men of whom it is puzzling to say whether they look, for their years, very youthful or surprisingly old. He was below the middle height, and his smooth pale face seemed at first sight almost boyish ; but the cold glance of the small blue eyes, the firmness of the compressed lips, and the tell-tale lines that were faintly visible at the angles of both eyes and mouth, were not such as we associate with ingenuous youth.

Captain Denzil (Jasper had at an early age attained, thanks to the golden ladder by

which the offspring of wealthy men were wont to climb, his captaincy in the light cavalry regiment to which he had till recently belonged) had proved himself an expensive son to Sir Sykes. His fair moustache, pallid face, and drawling accent were well known on race-courses, and quite familiar in those darkened rooms at fashionable clubs where the fickle goddess Chance is worshipped by card-players around their lamp-lit green tables, while it is honest daylight in the workaday world beyond.

He rode into the yard and dismounted; but instead of immediately entering the house, lingered to exchange a thoughtful word or two as to the signs of an incipient spavin in the off fore-leg of the fiery chestnut which he had been riding.

"Knew he wasn't sound, of course, when I bought him," remarked the captain, with

calm philosophy. "A friend's horse never is, especially when the friend is such an impulsive open-hearted fellow as Charley Granger. But he was cheap, and he has a turn of speed, and I've entered him for the Pebworth Steeplechase, and don't want to pay forfeit. So see to the bandages, Phillips, will you ; and don't have him out, except for gentle exercise on the soft, this fortnight. We mustn't neglect that leg."

Jasper was not one of those who care for a horse, as some of us do, for the horse's own sake, and out of genuine love for the noblest of the dumb servants that do the bidding of mankind. But he did regard the genus *equus* as a very valuable instrument for gambling purposes, and as such to be tended with jealous care, and helped, when onvenient, to victory on the turf.

With a slow step and a careless, indolent

manner, Jasper Denzil crossed the paved yard, and entered by a side-door the mansion that must one day in the course of nature be his, but of which as a place of residence we have already heard him express an opinion the reverse of flattering. There was very little at Carbery Chase to amuse the captain, cut off from his usual sources of excitement and a temporary exile from London and its pleasures. It was sorry work this pottering business of picking up a few ten-pound bets on country courses, or winning paltry stakes by the aid of wretched platers. It was better than nothing no doubt; precisely as at Monaco we see the ruined millionaire, Spanish or Russian, eagerly playing for silver when his last rouleaux of louis-d'or have taken wing; but he felt that it was a sore degradation for one whose dash and coolness had

won dubious compliments from very great personages.

Traversing a passage, Jasper presently crossed the great hall—full of costly marbles brought from Italy, in days when there were no manufacturers of the spurious antique—and opened the door of what was known as the morning-room, cheerful and bright as a morning-room should be, and overlooking the rose-garden, then glorious in its glow and blush of tender colour.

Two ladies were the occupants of the room, both young and both pretty, though each of them had that likeness to Jasper (her only brother) which we so constantly trace in members of the same family. Lucy, it is true, was dark-haired and dark-eyed; while Blanche, the younger and taller of the two, was delicately—perhaps too delicately—fair of complexion, and had hair of the

palest gold. Sir Sykes had been for several years a widower ; and all the Denzil family, with the exception of the baronet himself, were now present in that room, through the French windows of which came stealing in the fresh scent of roses.

“ I saw you, Jasper, from the pheasantry, as you came up the park ; but you did not see me,” said Miss Denzil, smiling. “ You did not stay, then, to see the finish of the Pebworth cricket-match ? ”

“ I—no ! ” answered Jasper, with a yawn. “ Cricket is amusing, I daresay, to those who knock the ball about, or to those who run to pick it up again, as the French countess said of our noble national game ; but it is slow—fearfully slow.” And the captain yawned again.

“ Most things are, I am afraid, at Carbery,” said Blanche, gently.—“ We have

tried to amuse him—have we not, Lucy?—by dragging him with us to such primitive merry-makings as lay within driving distance, archery-meetings, flower-shows”——

“Yes, and all manner of Arcadian entertainments of the same species,” interrupted Jasper, drumming with his ringed fingers on the glass of the open window near which he was standing. “I believe I had a narrow escape from what they called a syllabub party at that old woman’s (Lady Di Horner’s) house at Ottery St. Luke’s, with a cow on the lawn, and the rest of it. The natives, I suppose, like that kind of thing; I don’t.” There was a half-peevish lassitude in his tone, in his attitude, as he spoke, which added emphasis to words that were, if ungracious, perhaps not unkindly meant. But his sisters were not in the least offended that their brother should show so unaffected-



edly how little pleasure he took in their society, and how complete was his distaste for their simple pleasures and homely occupations. A grown-up brother is, in the eyes of good girls, a hero by right of birth, and with Lucy and Blanche the captain was a privileged person, not to be judged by the standards of ordinary ethics.

"If the governor," said Jasper, after a pause, "would ask people down here—I mean of course after town is empty—a houseful of people of the right sort, why then, one might get through the autumn and winter without being moped to death."

Lucy shook her head. "There is no chance, brother," she said, "that papa should fill his house with what you would consider people of the right sort. The Vanes will come of course, and the Henshaws, and"——

"Never mind the rest of the names," broke in the captain with a lazy brusqueness; "heavy county members, who know more of the points of a bullock than they do of those of a horse; and their fat wives and starched daughters. What have I done, to be buried alive in this way!"

Women have this merit, that they seldom retort, as they might sometimes do with crushing effect, upon a man who bewails his hard lot, be his self-pity ever so unreasonable. Lucy and Blanche Denzil knew, or guessed, with tolerable accuracy that it was due to Jasper's own extravagance that he no longer wore the gay trappings of a captain of Lancers, and that the soles of his varnished boots were no longer familiar with the Pall-Mall pavement.

"I'll go in and see my father; he's in the library, I suppose?" said Jasper, and

without waiting for an answer, he sauntered off.

Sir Sykes Denzil was a man of methodical habits, and his son's conjecture that he would be found at that hour in the library was quite warranted, not only by fact, but by his daily practice. On his way thither the young man passed by the suite of drawing-rooms, only the smallest of which was ever used, save on the occasions, not too frequent, when some great dinner-party or possibly a dance at Carbery Chase set all the neighbouring lanes and roads aglow with carriage-lamps. With all its splendour, the Court was what might be described as a dull house; the master of which had never made the most, even for selfish purposes, of his large share in the good things of this world.

The library, Sir Sykes's favourite room, was a stately apartment, with gilt cornices

and a richly-painted ceiling. It overlooked the stone terrace whereon, amidst statues and marble vases overbrimming with scarlet geraniums, the peacocks strutted. The great central window was of ancient stained glass, and from its quaint panes in their leaden setting flashed forth the lost colours of the blue and crimson, deemed inimitable for centuries past, but which probably owed their peculiar beauty to the corroding touch of time. This window, of which honourable mention was made in the county guide-book aforesaid, glimmered with heraldic blazonry, wherein the couchant greyhounds of the present owners of Carbery found no place.

The baronet, who was seated at his writing-table, strewn with papers, looked up as he heard the opening of the door, and greeted his son with rather a conventional smile of recognition. "So you are back

with us earlier than usual, Jasper," he said, in a tone that was polite, but scarcely cordial. The young man's voice, as usual with him when he addressed his father, had lost much of the languid insolence which habit had rendered natural to him.

"Yes, sir; I don't care much for cricket, so I did not stay to see the end of it. So far as I could hear, the Zingari were beating the County hollow. But, as I said before, that style of thing is not much in my line."

"Better for you, my boy, if it had been," returned the baronet dryly. "A young fellow cannot break his health or ruin his fortunes at cricket, as more fashionable pastimes may help him to do."

The captain winced and reddened. "I didn't expect a lecture, father," he said peevishly. "Indeed I'm not likely to forget the crasher I came down with, that my

misfortunes should be thrown in my teeth every day I live."

"We will let the subject drop," said the baronet after a momentary pause. "Who were at Pebworth to-day? No lack of company, I suppose? Our friends hereabouts are not all as complete cosmopolitans as you are, Jasper; and some of the ladies at any rate may have gone there in hopes of seeing Devon win the game."

Jasper half sullenly made answer that he could scarcely say who were there. "Fulfords and Courtenays and the Carews, and the people from Prideaux Park, yes; and the De Vere girls, and Harrogate their brother. The old Earl wasn't there, and the ladies went on horseback."

"Lady Gladys looks well on horseback," observed Sir Sykes, with a sidelong glance at his son.

“Yes; and rides nicely,” answered Jasper with an air of the most utter indifference; and then the eyes of the father and the son met, not frankly, but as the eyes of two wary fencing-masters might do at the instant of crossing swords. Sir Sykes and Jasper were not, so far as outward seeming went, in the least alike. The common attribute of worldliness they did indeed share, but neither in looks nor in manner did they resemble each other. The baronet was a tall and handsome man, whose dark hair was now dashed with gray, and his high forehead deeply lined, but who still presented to the eyes of the world a showy exterior and a bearing that was at once dignified, and urbane. That he was not in perfect health could only be conjectured from the slowness of his step, and those faintly marked furrows near the corners of the shapely mouth, in

which a shrewd physician might have read of mischief silently at work ; but to unprofessional scrutiny he appeared simply as a gentleman of a goodly presence.

A melancholy man, albeit a proud and a courteous one, Sir Sykes was known to be. And singularly enough, the baronet's sadness was supposed to date from the day when he had lost, long years ago, the eldest of his three daughters, a little girl to whom he was rumoured to have been unusually attached. This was the odder, because Sir Sykes was not the sort of man who is generally credited with very deep feelings or a peculiar strength of family affection. He had borne his wife's decease with polished equanimity ; but those who had known him in his early poverty and in his subsequent prosperity averred that the lord of Carbery had never been the same man since the death of this child.



"I wish," said Sir Sykes, speaking slowly, and poising a gold-hafted paper-knife between his soft white fingers—"I wish I could see you married and settled."

"The settling, if, as I suppose, it means the making of a suitable settlement, makes the main impediment to marrying, with some of us at least," rejoined Jasper with mock gravity; but before his father could reply, a servant entered bringing a letter. Sir Sykes mechanically took up the letter from the silver tray, and as mechanically opened it. But his eyes had hardly glanced at the first half-page before a great and sudden change came over his calm face; he grew white, almost livid, to his very lips, and let his hand which held the open letter drop heavily upon the table.

"Are you ill, sir?" said Jasper quickly, and with a sort of anxiety unusual with

him. It was impossible to avoid taking notice of the baronet's very evident emotion; impossible too not to connect the cause of it with the letter which Sir Sykes held in his hand. But the master of Carbery Chase rallied himself, and though his face was even ghastly in its pallor and his breath came painfully, he managed to smile as he rejoined: "Not ill. It is a mere pain, a spasm at most, which comes at times, but goes as quickly, or nearly so, as it comes. It is a trifle, not worth the talking about. It is getting late, and I have a note or two to write, and some papers to look over, before the dressing-bell rings. We shall meet at dinner presently."

Jasper rose to go. "I hardly like"—he began.

"I am better; I am well; it is nothing," interrupted Sir Sykes irritably; and then

blandly added: "I thank you, my dear boy, for your solicitude, but I am best alone."

Jasper had not proceeded two paces along the carpeted corridor before he heard the key of the library door turned from within.

"I'd give a cool hundred," said this exemplary youth, "to look over my father's shoulder as he reads that letter. To have a hold on the governor would"—— He left the rest of the sentence unspoken, and passed on, leaving Sir Sykes in the locked-up library to the company of his own solitary thoughts.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE LETTER.

WHEN Sir Sykes, left alone, addressed himself to the perusal of the crumpled letter which he had hitherto crushed in his clenched hand, it was with no light repugnance that he applied himself to the task. Slowly, and with shaking fingers, he unfolded and smoothed the ruffled paper, spread it on the table before him, and not hastily, but with a deliberate care that was evidently painful to him, read as follows: "Although a stranger to you, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet, I am no stranger to what took place on March 24, 18—. Should you wish this

matter to remain, 'as it has hitherto done, untalked of by the world, I must request that you will meet me this evening at *The Traveller's Rest*, by the cross-roads. I shall wait there for you until ten o'clock to-night, and will then name the terms on which you alone can reckon on my future silence.—Inquire for yours respectfully, DICK HOLD, staying at *The Traveller's Rest*."

The baronet read and re-read this letter with the patient endurance of a sufferer under the surgeon's knife. Nothing but his labouring breath and the deepening of the lines around his mouth, and the furrows on his high forehead, betrayed the pain that this precious document, indited in a large sprawling hand, occasioned him. When he had gone through it for the second time, he rose, and filling a glass with water from a bottle that stood on a side-table, he drank a

deep draught, and then paced to and fro with hasty irregular steps, as some men do when suddenly called upon for earnest thought and prompt decision.

“I will not go!” he said authoritatively, but in a low voice—“I will not go.”

Such a peremptory summons as that which he had received implied more than it stated. It was couched in terms which were sufficiently civil; but the tone was still that of command, not of entreaty or persuasion. Most gentlemen of the degree of Sir Sykes would have treated such a demand either as a piece of insufferable insolence or as the freak of a madman. The baronet knew well enough what sort of reception his neighbours, Lord Wolverhampton, Carew of Carew, or Fulford of Carstennis, would have given to a request so impudent. He was, as they were, a justice of the peace and deputy-

lieutenant, owner of a fine estate, one whose name was mentioned with respect wherever men did congregate.

The meekest of us all are apt to rebel against unwarrantable dictation. And Sir Sykes was not meek. His friends and his servants—lynx-eyed as we are apt to be to the foibles of others—knew that he was in his unobtrusive way a proud man. The stronger, therefore, must have been the influence that drew him, as the magnet draws iron to itself, towards that unsavoury house of entertainment whence his unknown correspondent had dated his missive. The first dressing-bell clanged out its call unheeded, and it was only when the second bell rang that Sir Sykes recalled his wandering thoughts sufficiently to remember that it was time for him to dress, and that whatever cares might be busy at his heart, he

must yet wear his mask decorously before the world. Dinner on that day at Carbery Court was not a peculiarly genial meal. The baronet had taken, with his accustomed regularity, his place at the table; but he was pale, and looked older by some years than he had done a few hours since. Yet he resented Lucy's half-timid inquiry: "You are not ill, papa, I hope?" and quietly declared that he was perfectly well. The domestic relations differ so much in varying conditions of life, that there are parents whose every thought and deed appears to be the common property of the home circle, and others who sanction no trespass on that inner self, the *to auton* of the Greeks, which each of us carries in the recesses of his own heart.

Sir Sykes Denzil was one of those men who, as husband and father, never carry



their confidences beyond a certain convenient limit. He was no tyrant, and his daughters, who fondly loved him and who believed in his love for them, looked with regret on the cloud that so often rested on his yet handsome features. But he had known how to preserve his jealously guarded individuality from the encroachments of affectionate interference, so that it was but very rarely that his actions were the theme of open comment. Blanche and Lucy, therefore, though with feminine nicety of observation they noted that their father could not eat, but that he emptied his glass again and again, said nothing; while Jasper, as he watched Sir Sykes with a stealthy inquisitiveness, made the mental reflection that "the governor must be hard hit, very hard indeed;" and secretly determined to turn the occasion to his own peculiar profit.

"Jasper!" said Lucy anxiously, some time after the dinner had come to an end, "what is the matter with papa? Do you know if he is really unwell, or if anything has gone wrong? I waited here for you, in case you might know what is amiss."

Jasper, who had been intercepted as he was leaving the house for his customary twilight stroll, with a cigar between his lips, turned lazily round. "How can I tell, Lucy?" he returned indifferently. "I'm not the keeper of my father's conscience, as the Lord Chancellor, by a polite fiction, is supposed to be of the king's."

"I only meant, has anything occurred to your knowledge," pleaded Miss Denzil, "calculated to annoy or distress him? Anything, for instance, about you?"

"How about me!" demanded Jasper, with a slight start, and a slight frown.

“Don’t be angry, brother ; I only meant, dear, about your debts,” answered the girl, laying her hand on Jasper’s arm.

“Has he been talking to you on that delightful subject ?” retorted the brother, almost roughly. “No ; I see that he has not ; at least not very lately. One would think to hear that eternal refrain of debts, debts, debts for ever jangling in my ears, that I was the first fellow who ever overran the constable. Surely I’m punished enough, if I *did* owe a trifle, by being caged up in this wearisome old Bastille of a house, and—— There, there ; Lucy, don’t cry. I’ll not say a word more against Carbery, and, you may set your mind at rest. If the governor has anything to vex him, be assured that it is not in the least connected with so insignificant a person as myself.” And, as though weary of the subject, he sauntered off.

It was Sir Sykes's habit on most evenings to spend a short time, half-an-hour or so, in the drawing-room. He liked music ; and Blanche, his younger daughter, who had been gifted with the sweet voice and delicate sense of harmony which are often found in conjunction with frail health, knew the airs and the songs that best suited him. He never, under any circumstances, remained long in company with his daughters, being one of those men to whom the society of women is in itself uncongenial ; but on this particular evening he went straight from the dining-room to the library, and sipped his coffee there, while the twilight deepened into the gloom of night.

The day had been fine enough, but the sun had sunk in a cloud-bank of black and orange, and there were not wanting signs that a change of weather was at hand. The

wind had risen, and the clouds gathered as the sun went down, and it seemed as though the proverbial fickleness of our climate would soon be illustrated. But Sir Sykes, as he went forth shortly after the clock on the turret had struck nine, paid no heed to the weather, save that once or twice he glanced upwards with a sort of half-conscious satisfaction at the darkling sky. The night, with its friendly shadows and its threats of a coming storm, suited far better with his purpose than cloudless azure and bright moonlight would have done. The moon, not as yet long risen, was young and wan, and her feeble lustre fell but at rare intervals through the wrack of hurrying clouds. The larches in the plantations quivered and the aspens by the trout-stream trembled as the gusts of wailing wind went by; while the giant trees in the park, each one a citadel of refuge to

squirrel and song-bird, sent down a rustling sound, as though every one out of their million leaves had found a tiny voice of its own to give warning of the approaching gale. Sir Sykes skirted the lawn, passed through the shrubbery, and struck into a path seldom trodden except by the feet of his keepers, which led northwards through the park.

There is something ignominious in the very fact that the master of any dwelling, howsoever humble, should steal away from it with as earnest a desire to elude observation as though he had been a robber of hen-roosts or a purloiner of spoons. And perhaps such a proceeding appeared still more so in the case of the owner of so stately a place as Carbery. Sir Sykes felt, as he glided, unseen as he hoped, past paling and thicket, at once angry and ashamed. So repugnant to him was the errand on which his mind was bent,

that on reaching a private door in the northern wall of the park he came to a halt, and held as it were parley with himself before proceeding on the quest of the writer of the letter.

“ I do not know this fellow,” he muttered wrathfully : “ the man’s very name is strange to me. But the twenty-fourth of March—*that* can be no mistake, no coincidence. That fatal date has burned itself too deeply into my brain for me to disregard or to forget it. Yes, I must go ; I suppose that I must go.”

And with a heavy sigh, the master of that fair demesne and of many a broad acre beyond it felt in his pocket for the key that would open the postern before which he stood, unlocked the door, went out, and reclosed and fastened it behind him. Then, without further hesitation, he entered into a

lane, the straggling branches of the hazels that grew on the high banks to left and right almost brushing against his person as he walked briskly on. So long as he had been within the limits of Carbery Chase, Sir Sykes had done his best to escape notice, keeping as often as he could tree and bush and rising ground between himself and the grand house of which he was absolute proprietor. But now he ceased to turn his head and look or listen for any sign that he was followed, and pushed on, assured that his clandestine exit from Carbery was unknown to any but himself. Sir Sykes, however, was very much mistaken. He was dogged by the very pursuer whom, perhaps, of all others he would have wished to keep in ignorance as to his conduct. Jasper, whose feline vigilance, once awakened, could not readily be lulled to sleep, had kept



watch upon his father's actions with a quiet patient steadiness which nothing but vengeance or the greed of gain could possibly have inspired. There is a certain sympathy, especially with crooked motives, which enables us to anticipate the stratagems of those with whom we have intercourse, and of this Jasper had his full share.

He was scarcely surprised when from his place of espial he saw his father quit the house and thread his way through the grounds after such a fashion as made it manifest that the baronet desired his excursion to remain a secret to those beneath his roof. That something abnormal should happen as a consequence of the letter which Sir Sykes had received, and the reading of which had so powerfully affected its recipient, the captain had considered as so probable, that he thought it worth his while to lie in

wait for the surprisal of the secret. Of two probable hypotheses, Jasper, whose imagination was of a chastened and practical order, had chosen rather to fancy that some stranger would arrive, than that the baronet should himself go forth to meet that stranger. But when he saw his father's tall figure vanish amidst the shadows of the dense evergreens and leafy lime-trees, he was not in the least astonished.

"When it was a question of nobbling the *Black Prince*," he said meditatively, "I wouldn't trust myself, nor would Gentleman Pratt, to talking it over anywhere but on Bletchley Downs with the vagabonds who hoccussed the horse, and who would for a fiver have sold their own fathers."

Some recollection that he, Jasper Denzil, late a captain in Her Majesty's service, was at that moment engaged, so far as in him

lay, in the questionable operation of 'selling' his own father, here caused a twinge to his callous heart. But we are seldom without some moral anodyne wherewith to lull to sleep that troublesome monitor, conscience; and Jasper had but need to remember his debts, his difficulties, and the fact that men at his club spoke of him as 'Poor Denzil—played out, sir!' to assuage the momentary pang which some as yet smouldering sense of honour occasioned to him.

The skill with which he followed Sir Sykes, keeping the object of his pursuit fully in view, yet never for an instant compromising himself by coming into the range of vision, should the baronet, as he often did, turn his head, would have done credit to a Comanche Indian on the war-path. It was by a subtle instinct, not by practice, that he availed himself of the shelter of tree and

HELENA, LADY HARROGATE.

ke and hollow, until at length, himself observed, he made sure that Sir Sykes was heading towards the private door in the northern wall of the park. There was a gate kept continually unlocked on the right of way, some six hundred yards to the eastward, and from this the captain could issue without difficulty. As to the private door, Sir Sykes had a key to its lock ; Jasper had none. The latter's door was instantly made up.

He sybarite though he was, the captain was fleet of foot, an accomplishment perhaps not common among languid men about town, rather than healthy hardy dwellers in the country would readily imagine. He had made money once and again by the lightness of his heels, and they did him good service as, after a rapid rush across the elastic turf of the park, and a quick traversing of

the heathery surface of the rugged common-land beyond, he caught a glimpse of his father's stately figure as it passed in between the tall hedges of the lane.

"It's lucky I can run a bit!" gasped out Jasper as he paused for an instant to take breath, and then passing his cambric handkerchief across his brow, on which the heat-drops stood thickly, plunged into the dark lane between the steep banks of which the object of his pursuit had disappeared. And now his task was the easier, in that Sir Sykes, intent on what lay before him, and confident that his manner of leaving his home was unknown, never once turned his head to look back.

A ghastly sight it was—had human eye been there to note it—which the wan moon shewed, when at uncertain intervals her white light fell on the pale faces of these

two men, father and son, so much and so little alike, who were wending their way thus along the deep Devonshire lane. In front was Sir Sykes, moody indeed and downcast, but a gentleman of a goodly presence ; while behind him came with feline footfall his only son, as craftily eager in the chase as even a garrotter, our British Thug, could have been. Once beyond the lane, the baronet and his kindred spy had to traverse a tract of ragged and desolate common, where the horse-road dwindled to a track of cart-wheels in the peaty soil, and where Jasper felt that concealment would have been difficult, had the baronet but looked behind him.

But the rain, long threatened, came on, urged by the strength of the sobbing wind, and Captain Denzil congratulated himself on the friendly darkness that ensued. Nor was

it long before Sir Sykes caught sight of the dead tree, on a knotted bough of which was the signboard of *The Traveller's Rest*, the dilapidated roof and battered front of which could dimly be seen through the gloom of night.

“After all, why not?” ejaculated Jasper, as he saw his father, after a moment's hesitation, disappear within the ruinous porch of the roadside public-house.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AT THE TRAVELLER'S REST.

"PERSON of the name of Hold? I should think so, rather. Want to see him, do you? Turn to your right, then; get up them stone steps, and just keep straight till you're past the water-butt, and you'll twig the tap-room door."

It was a sharp-eyed, sharp-tongued boy who spoke, a boy in a tattered jacket that had once been blue, and had once been garnished with brass anchor buttons; but who retained his Cockney accent and his air of brisk effrontery, like that of a London sparrow.



"Can't you make out Her Majesty's English, Mr. Stiffback?" said this impudent servitor of *The Traveller's Rest*, seeing that Sir Sykes hesitated.

"You keep a civil tongue, Deputy," broke in a deeper voice from within the darkling passage. "This, I suppose, is the gentleman who received a letter from a party called Hold? Very good. This way, sir, please; and mind you don't hurt your head against the beam, for the ceiling's low and light's scarce. So. Here we are; and this is the tap-room, and my name is Hold. At this end of the room we'll be quietest."

And the baronet passively permitted himself to be led up some stone steps and down some brick steps, and finally into a long low room, at one end of which, although the weather was warm and the season summer, there glowed and crackled a large fire of

mingled peat and wood, around which were clustered seven or eight persons male and female, two of whom were smoking short discoloured pipes, while the others were conversing in hoarse tones, or sniffing, with somewhat of a wolfish expression of countenance, the savoury fumes that arose from a frying-pan which a gaunt man in frowsy black was carefully holding over the hottest part of the fire.

There was a low wooden screen or partition, about breast-high, which stretched across some three-fourths of this delectable apartment, which was rudely furnished with some wooden settles and rush-bottomed chairs, and a couple of greasy tables, vamped and clamped with sheet-iron to repair the injury which excitable customers had done to the woodwork.

“My name, Sir Sykes, is Hold,” said the

owner of the name, when the baronet had taken his seat on one of the mean-looking chairs, and his singular correspondent had placed himself on one of the benches opposite.

"I never heard it before, nor, to the best of my recollection have we ever met," said Sir Sykes dryly.

"Ah, yes, but we have met, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet," returned Hold, with a twinkle of satisfaction in his bold black eyes; "not that it's any wonder you do not remember so humble a chap as yours truly. I have the advantage of you."

These last words were uttered with a malicious emphasis which caused Sir Sykes to look again and keenly in the man's face, while cudgelling his memory, though in vain, to find some guiding clue. He saw a hard, fierce, swarthy countenance, dark hair

partly grizzled, and a powerfully built frame, such as matched well with the face. Had Sir Sykes on the Bench been consulted by his brother magistrates as to the number of calendar months of imprisonment with hard labour to be allotted to such a one as Hold, he would have said at once : "Give him the heaviest sentence warranted by law, for, unless Lavater's science be false, there could scarcely exist a more dangerous scoundrel."

Sir Sykes, however, was not on the Bench, nor Hold in the dock at quarter-sessions. So he merely replied, with a steady look : "No, Mr. Hold, or whatever your name may be. To the best of my belief, I never in my life saw you."

"Very good," quietly returned the man, taking out a black pocket-book much frayed and battered, and rustling over the dog's-eared leaves. "Let me see ; yes, March

the twenty-fourth is the first important date."

"And may I ask," interposed Sir Sykes, with somewhat of the cold haughtiness which had stood him in good stead in many a moral duel, "what is the meaning of these perpetual references to a specified day in March?"

Hold's low inward laugh was one of sincere enjoyment. "It's not only at cards, Sir Sykes," he said with a chuckle, "that the game of brag can be played. But come, it's of no use, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet. My hand's too strong—chokeful of court-cards, kings, queens, knaves, and aces—to give you a chance. I have entries here"—slapping the black pocket-book—"for more days than one. Take one of 'em at random. You have cause to remember the ninth of April in the same year, Sir Sykes. So have

I." And with a nod and a wink, Hold slid back the book into an inner pocket of his rough coat.

The baronet's blanched face and anxious eye betrayed how deeply he was agitated by what he had heard.

"What do you want of me?" he asked abruptly, but in a tremulous voice.

"Hark ye, shipmate!" rejoined the other, leaning his head on his hand, while his elbow rested on the stained and chipped table beside him; "all in good time. Business is business, and is not to be disposed of in that sort of hop, skip, and jump way. Take another look at me, if you like; and since you can't tell who I am, say *what* I am."

"I should say," answered Sir Sykes, gazing with undisguised repugnance at the outward man of his dubious acquaintance, "that you have been a sailor."

“No great wit wanted, I reckon,” retorted Hold roughly, “to make out that much. The very mermaid on my arm here, and the crown and the anchor,” he continued, baring his brawny wrist so as to exhibit the blue tattoo marks which it bore, “would tell you that. But I’ve followed more trades than one; tried them all in turn, sir. How does that idle string of words that schoolboys say, come off the tongue? Ay, I have it—Tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor. Why, I’ve been everything on the urchin’s roll-call except thief; I never was quite that—or gentleman, which is a cut above me.”

“You have seen the world evidently,” said Sir Sykes in a bland tone; “but you must remember, Mr. Hold, that you have not as yet explained to me with sufficient clearness the nature of your business with me.”

"Labour lost, if I did," rejoined Hold with a cynical smile. "A secret is best of course when it belongs to one only. Two may get some good out of it; but once it's common property, the goose that laid the golden eggs is picked bare to the last bone. Do you see," he added, dropping his voice, "our good friends yonder, and do you suppose that such as they are not all ears, as it were, to snap up any odds and ends of our talk? He with the frying-pan is as knowing a hand as any in England—a begging-letter writer, as the newspaper paragraphs call it. And the others, well! the others are all on the lay more or less, to scratch up a living by their wits. It's only the cream of the cadging profession that can afford to patronise the *Rest*. It's quite a genteel hotel of its class, I assure you. But now you know why I don't speak out. Better deal with



me singly, than with all these blood-suckers, I should say. And so, as we understand each other, we need not enlighten others."

"Is there no more private place?" the baronet began.

But Hold broke curtly in: "None, Sir Sykes, in a crib like this. Upstairs, we'd double the risk of being overheard. Walls have ears, you know. Now here, where we can see into the garden from this open window at my elbow, we're pretty safe.—Deputy!" (this was addressed to the sharp boy in the ragged jacket) "two glasses of rum, d'ye hear?"

Sir Sykes had had time to think, and it was in a firm tone that he now spoke.

"Now, Mr. Hold," he said, "I am a man of the world, and as such will not affect indignation or astonishment in the fact that you wish to bargain with me, for your own

advantage, as to certain painful events of my earlier life. Name your terms, but be moderate. The law, as you are aware, is not very indulgent towards those who extort money by means of threats or calumnies."

Hold's face, hitherto good-humoured, wore an ugly scowl. "Drop that style of argument, if you're wise, baronet," he said resolutely. "Dick Hold is not often backward, when folks will fire shotted guns instead of harmless blank cartridge. Come, come, commodore; if you dared to indict me, you'd hardly be here. Try that game, if you choose. It only serves the turn of those who can come into court with clean hands. Yours mayhap would shew a stain or so.—Here is Deputy with the rum. Let us drink, sir, to our better acquaintance, and be friends."

Sir Sykes, however, pushed back the glass

which Hold proffered him. Sunk in his own estimation though he might be, he could not stoop to pledge a ruffian of the stamp of this one.

"Your very good health, Sir Sykes Denzil, Baronet," said Hold unconcernedly, as he tossed off his liquor. "We wear well, both of us; though many a year has gone over our heads since that ninth of April that you know of."

"Were you at Sandston, then, on that day?" asked the baronet, thrown off his guard, and a slight quivering of Hold's eyelid told that a point had been scored against his incautious opponent.

"Not so. At Tunbridge Wells rather," returned Hold slowly. "I remember seeing the funeral—that of the poor little girl of yours who died, Sir Sykes."

Sir Sykes grew almost as white as he had

done when first he began the reading of the letter which had drawn him to such a rendezvous.

"You will oblige me, sir," he said in a voice that he vainly tried to render firm and calm, "by being silent in future as to—as to"—

"So that we understand one another, I agree to anything," was Hold's half-sullen rejoinder.

"And now to come to terms. You want money, no doubt?" said Sir Sykes more composedly.

"All people, to the best of my belief, want money," replied Hold with a grin. "I am no cormorant, no shearer and skinner of such as come under my handling. Just now, Sir Sykes, I will only ask you for five hundred—a fleabite!"

The demand, considering the baronet's

rank and means, was unexpectedly moderate. Sir Sykes in turn produced his pocket-book. "Few men," he said, "keep such a sum in ready cash. But it so happens"—laying down a roll of bank-notes upon the squalid table—"that I have money, two hundred and thirty pounds, with me; and here"—pencilling a few words on a leaf which he tore out of the book—"is my written promise for two seventy. I will send you a cheque to-morrow."

"Nothing," observed Hold, "could be more satisfactory. Don't send a groom; grooms chatter; the post is safer. You won't drink the rum, Sir Sykes? I will." And he swallowed the alcohol at a gulp, and then swept notes and paper into his pocket. "One thing more, Sir Sykes. I did not come here for hush-money and

nothing else. I want you to take into your house and as a member of your family a person — of my recommending, Sir Sykes."

"I fail to comprehend you, Mr. Hold," said the baronet stiffly.

The other laughed. "Her name," he said, "is Ruth."

"Ruth!" exclaimed Sir Sykes, starting from his seat, and speaking so unguardedly that the unwashed crew at the firelit end of the room turned to peer at him.

"Yes, Ruth. Don't you like the name?" asked the fellow coarsely. "My sister, Ruth Hold."

"Ruth — your sister — yours — at Carbery?" gasped out the bewildered baronet.

"You need not be afraid," was the rough reply: "she won't disgrace your fine house or your dainty ways. I doubt if your misses

at home are more thoroughly the lady than Ruth Hold—my—sister.”

“You must see, your own good sense must shew you,” stammered out Sir Sykes, looking the picture of abject terror, as the smoky glare of the lamp fell on his pale face, “that even were I willing to consent to so extraordinary—— In short, it cannot be.”

“Sorry for you, then!” returned Hold with a shrug; “for on your acceptance of these terms alone is my silence to be bought. Come, come, shipmate! hear reason. Ruth shall bear any surname you like, and it can’t be hard to account for her coming to Carbery. You knew her father—an old friend—military—died in India—left you her guardian, Ruth’s guardian? eh, Sir Sykes?”

“I—I will take time to think of it,” said the baronet confusedly. “You shall hear

from me to-morrow. And now, I had better go."

And he rose. Hold re-conducted him, civilly enough, as far as the outer door, and watched him depart through the howling wind and driving rain towards Carbery. But what neither Hold nor Sir Sykes could have conjectured was that Jasper Denzil, hidden in a crazy arbour among the sun-flowers and pot-herbs of the inn garden, hard by the open window, had during the greater portion of the interview played the part of an unsuspected eavesdropper, and was now on his way by another route to Carbery Chase.



## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE WASTE.

It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at the village school of High Tor, and the work of learning and the yet harder toil of teaching were for that day over. Ethel Gray had seen the last of her released pupils scamper joyously off homewards, and was busied in putting away books and maps, when the clatter of heavy shoes caused her to turn her eyes towards the doorway, wherein stood a tall slip of a girl, looking absurdly big and bony for the clothes which she had outgrown. Ethel knew the freckled face, and smiled pleasantly in answer to its owner's grin of recognition.

"If you please, miss," said the new-comer, sidling towards the school-mistress—"if you please, mother sent I down from the moor to say how 'twas my little brother didn't 'tend here nouter Monday, nor yetterer Tuesday, nor now. Little Lenny be down in the fever; that's why he ben't here, please."

"What fever?" asked Ethel. She had not been long enough at High Tor to become thoroughly familiar with the diction of the country folks.

"*The* fever, to be sure!" reiterated the tall girl, who might have been some fourteen years of age, amazed that so learned a personage as she took Miss Gray to be should boggle over so patent a physiological fact. "It do be going about most at fall-time; but Lenny's only a wishy one, ye know, so he's took with the shiver fits in

June, getting wet at the hayfield; and so, mother bein' main fond o' he, as we'm all, when he begs her to 'let Miss Gray, to school, know 'twarn't his fault,' why mother says: 'Betty, get thee down to village and do the child's arrand.' That be all."

The quick tears rose glistening to Ethel's eyes. There was something pathetic in the idea of this tiny sufferer tossing on his bed of pain beneath the rotting thatch of the cottage among the moor-lands, and anxious to excuse his involuntary default to the kind teacher whom he had already learned to love. He was a pet pupil of Ethel's, this wee boy Lenny, or Leonard Mudge by name, as being one of those rare learners who seem to thirst after the fountains of knowledge towards which others have to be cajoled or driven. Day after day had the new school-mistress seen Lenny in class, the

readiest to come, the least eager to leave, his bright large eyes intent upon the face of his instructress.

The parents had been proud of the little fellow's cleverness, and with an unselfishness not universal in the poor and struggling class to which they belonged, had contrived not merely to save the school-pence that supplemented the government grant, but to send the boy down under such escort as could be found for him, day after day. Now it was a carter, who would perch Lenny on the shaft of his rough chariot; now a stalwart lass, bent on earning her nine-pence for a day's hard work at the washing-tub, and who allowed the little scholar to trot by her side; sometimes a mushroom-gatherer or gleaner of whortleberries from the waste, and who was not unwilling to take temporary charge of Lenny. Some-

times, as a great concession, Sister Betty would be spared from weeding or cow-tending, to convoy Leonard, too young to go alone, to High Tor. As for Betty herself, she had been relegated, long ago in the bygone days of her own short schooling, into the category of unteachables. She was a good girl; but two successive mistresses had given her up as a hopeless dunce, long before Betty began to earn two-thirds of her own living, and Ethel Gray to be mistress of High Tor school.

“I’ll go and see Lenny. It is a half-holiday for me, you know, as well as for the children. How far is it, Betty? But I’m sure it is not too far, for I am a tolerable walker, if you will shew me the way,” said Ethel impulsively. Now this, as Betty knew, was the very consummation which her mother, whose perceptions had been for

the time sharpened by the stimulus of maternal love, desired to bring about. The moorland lass was not much of a diplomatist, but she was quite well aware that to exaggerate the difficulties of an enterprise is often to damp the spirits of those who undertake it.

"It's not fur," said Betty argumentatively; "that's to say," she added, as her conscience smote her, "not to call fur, but a goodish walk. But 'tis mortal fine to-day. And Lenny he'd be so glad!"

Ethel hesitated no longer, but merely mentioning her errand to the decent old village dame who was her housekeeper and factotum, threw her rain-cloak over her arm—no bad precaution in that moist climate—and under Betty's guidance set forth. As to the beauty of the day, Betty was speaking within bounds when she described it as

‘mortal fine.’ The sparkling sky was as blue as a sapphire, and the breeze balmy enough to have blown over the orange groves and geranium hedges of Bermuda. It was, in short, one of those so-called ‘gaudy’ mornings which rarely, in the uncertain climate of our latitudes, finish as they have begun ; least of all among the wilds of savage Dartmoor, the very cradle and nesting-place of bad weather.

A long walk it was, over rough and smooth, over wet and dry, by road and track of very various quality, to the cluster of moorland cottages, far off in an upland valley, where dwelt the Mudge family. Betty knew the mileage pretty well, but she kept the information to herself, lest, as she said in her own heart, ‘school-mistress’ should be ‘scared.’ She had a very poor opinion personally of the physical powers of book-

learned fellow-creatures ; but when she found how well her companion kept pace with her on the steep hill-side, she paused once to say, with shy approval : ' 'Tis yarely well ye walk, miss. We'll be there before long."

A curiously contrasted pair would these two have appeared, had any competent observer been there to note the difference between them, as they scaled the edges of the lofty table-land, gashed by ravines and dotted by crags, which constitutes Dartmoor. Betty's personal appearance has been mentioned. To say that a young female looks lanky and gawky, may, however frequently such adjectives are upon feminine lips, be thought to imply some irreverence towards the sex. But it would be impossible to conceive an accurate idea of Betty Mudge without constructing an ideal portrait of her



that should depict her as gawky and lanky, a large-boned, freckled, well-meaning young creature, willingly accepting the responsibilities of a life of hard work and contented ignorance.

Ethel Gray, on the other hand, was a very beautiful girl. Beauty, as we know, is independent of its surroundings, and there is no reason why a village school-mistress should not possess that dangerous gift. Her plain dress, her plain little hat, could not hide the fact that her figure was faultless, and that she possessed a lovely face and hair that in its dark luxuriance deserved to be called magnificent. What was more remarkable was the sweet dignity of her manner, frank and unpretending as it was. No one could be gentler than Ethel. Children were at home with her at once. But she seemed to be one of those who are born to be

respected, without advancing any especial claim to consideration.

Lenny Mudge's sister ought to have known better than to have entered, with the rash confidence of youth, on what was really five miles of rough walking, on that most treacherous of days, locally denominated as 'spoiled,' when a sunny morning is succeeded by the oncoming of a mist as dense as if it had boiled up from the sullen shores of Cocytus or Acheron. The fog fell, as Dartmoor fogs did fall before Britain saw the Roman eagles, with the rapidity of a theatrical drop-scene cutting off the mimic presentment from the clapping hands and levelled opera-glasses of the spectators. Only in this case it was stern reality.

"Doan't you be afeard, miss," said Betty sturdily; "I be moorland born and bred, and I'll hammer it out somehow."

But this boast was more easy to make than to fulfil, for everywhere hung, poised in air, something like a silvery veil, shutting out from sight all familiar landmarks, and rendering it impossible to distinguish any object two paces distant. The mist had fallen so abruptly from the huge Tors, as it seemed, that rose here and there like watch-towers of the waste, that a fanciful imagination might have conceived the seething vapour to represent a semi-transparent drapery, suddenly cast from a giant hand over land and sea.

But a minute or two before, Ethel had allowed her eyes to rest admiringly on the many-coloured surface of the vast moor, here robed in purple of imperial splendour, there of tenderest green, and anon brown or crimson or bluish gray, as shrub and berry and weed and wild-flower dappled the

rolling ocean of heather. Then below was the cultured plain, furrowed by thickly wooded clefts, through which the Dartmoor streams ran brawling to the sea, that lay calm and blue and flecked with white sails, so plainly within the range of vision. And now all was changed, and it was fog, fog, and fog only, girdling in the wayfarers on every hand, and there was no knowing whither to turn.

Betty Mudge did her best ; but her zeal outran her discretion ; and indeed the task of pilot in that rolling mist was no easy one. Had there but been a hard road, though never so narrow, beneath her feet, the girl would have gone on cheerfully enough. But there was no real road for about half the distance between High Tor and Shaws, as that solitary spot where stood the abode of the Mudges was called, merely a congeries of

winding cart-ruts, among which, in moderately clear weather, it was facile for one who knew the country to make short-cuts at pleasure.

"If we were to go back?" suggested Ethel, after a while; but Betty Mudge by no means accepted the proposition.

"It be just as easy, miss, to go forrard as to go backarder," returned Lenny's sister doggedly; "but what's main hard in the thick is to know which is which."

They went on for some time without speaking.

"I was listening," at last said the young guide abruptly, "for a sheep-bell. If I could but hear that, shepherd would put us right."

But though Ethel hearkened also, in hopes of catching the far-off tinkle of a bell from some folded flock, the silence remained as

unbroken as though man, with all his works and ways, had been banished from the island. Nothing but blinding mist to greet the eye, nothing but heather and peat and stones beneath the feet, as the two stumbled and groped forward, going deeper and deeper, for aught they knew, into the heart of the wilderness. The misty vapour heaved and rolled like a billowy sea, taking fantastic shapes, here of a threatening giant, there of a winding sheet spread by no mortal hand, there again of a battlemented castle rearing its towers aloft.

There are landscape painters—even aspiring young Associates, newly elected, of the Royal Academy—whom it would have greatly gratified to have been on the moor that day, and to have seen the fluctuating hues of the mist, here fleecy snow, there translucent silver, elsewhere such pearly

grays as the colour-box fails to render, while sunwards a faint pale shimmering streak of tender opal stretched like Jacob's ladder, almost from heaven to earth. It was a study worthy of an artist's heed too, the manner in which the bare bleak Tors, red, brown, gray, according to the nature of the stone, cropped up from the moor, each crag rising out of the peaty soil like the bones of a buried Titan. But poor Ethel became very tired as she wandered on under the aimless guidance of Betty Mudge, who was herself tired, and who could but guess, and that wildly, in which direction home might lie.

"Ware!" she cried, as Ethel was about to plant her foot unsuspectingly on an inviting patch of emerald turf. "Yon's bog, yon is, deep enow to suck down a horse to the saddle-laps. Never trust the green, and the greener the softer, miss. Send, we

moun't a strayed to Heronsmere or the Blackpool, for there be swamps there would swallow bigger nor we. Gran'father, they tell, smouthered in Blackpool, but 'twere in winter-time."

Then there came creeping like insidious enemies into Ethel's mind all the weird legends which since her stay at High Tor she had heard regarding the waste. There were tales of belated horsemen and lonely foot-travellers overwhelmed by snow-storms in winter, and lying dead among the drifts, the prey of the hill-fox and the carrion crow. There were tales too of those who had been lost in the blinding mist, and had either perished in some quagmire, or died miserably of hardship and exhaustion, after many hours of walking on the moor.

"It ben't of no manner o' good!" said



Betty, after another long spell of silence. "We may walk till we drop. I'm main tired myself. And what's the use? For oughter we know, we may be going round and round."

Ethel too was weary, so weary that it was with difficulty she could raise her voice to urge on her now desponding companion the expediency of a renewed effort. "Surely, surely," she said, "we shall, if we persevere, come upon some road or see the lights—for it must be getting late—in some farm or cottage."

"One Tor be terrible like another," returned Betty with a sob. "I got no more notion whirrabouts we be, nor if I were fresh dropped out of the moon. I'm no use here, and can hardly drag. And what'll mother say!"

And the girl sat down on a fragment of

rock which jutted from a bluff stony Tor rising overhead, and began to weep. And then there forced itself on Ethel's mind the dreadful thought that they had perhaps really been walking in a circle until their forces were spent, and might die of fatigue, cold, and even hunger before they should be discovered. Who could tell when the fog would disperse! The mist might overhang the lofty table-land of the moor for whole days, possibly for weeks, cutting the lost ones as completely off from succour as some shipwrecked mariner on his desolate isle. No sound floated to Ethel's ears as she listened long and eagerly.

"Don't cry, Betty; don't cry. Something—I know not what—tells me that we shall get through this safely yet," said Ethel, as she too took her seat upon the rock, and laid her hand kindly on that of her young

companion. But Betty only blubbered the more furiously.

"'Taint so much for me, miss!" she said. "It be my fault, every bit on't. I brought you here. And Lenny—and mother"—The train of ideas thus conjured up acted so strongly on the untutored imagination of Betty Mudge, that she wept so loudly and dolefully that her wails re-echoed through the solitary waste.

What was that? Surely a human voice calling aloud at some distance through the fog, as if in answer to Betty's inarticulate plaint. Yes, there was no mistake this time. It was the hearty halloo of a deep voice, and the words were: "Ho! I say, there! What ails you? Anything wrong?"

"We be lost in fog!" called out the girl by way of answer.

"It's a woman or a child," exclaimed

another voice from the mist. "Push on, Bates! The cry came from this direction to the left." And presently, bursting through the floating wreaths of vapour, appeared the figures of two men, the shorter and sturdier of whom, a gamekeeper by his velveteen coat and leathern gaiters, and the metal dog-whistle at his button-hole, led a pony with a creel strapped to the saddle-bow.

"Here they are, my Lord!" ejaculated this functionary, as he caught sight of the forlorn two upon the rock. The gentleman to whom he spoke came hurrying up across the stony ground, a fishing-rod in his hand.

"Don't be frightened, my little maid," he called out cheerily to Betty, who wept more unrestrainedly than ever, now that help was near; and then, catching a glimpse of Ethel's pale beautiful face as she looked up, he exclaimed: "Why, this is a lady—here!"

and instinctively he raised his hat. "Stop! It is Miss Gray from the village, if I am not mistaken. — You must let me see you safely off the moor. I live near, at High Tor; though I daresay you do not know me, Miss Gray. I have seen you at church."

"Yes, I know you, Lord Harrogate," returned Ethel, trying to rise, but sinking back fainting and giddy on her rocky seat. "I am sorry to give you trouble, but"—— Her voice failed her, and her eyes seemed to be darkened. The quick revulsion of feeling, from what was all but sheer despair to the consciousness of being saved, had intensified the effects of great physical fatigue. She heard the young man's voice addressing herself, but could not distinguish the words because of the low droning sound that filled her ears as she sat passive on the rock. Who

he was she quite well knew. It was not possible for the member of a small congregation such as that in High Tor church to be ignorant of the features of so notable an occupant of Lord Wolverhampton's pew as the Earl's son and heir. Tall, handsome, and manly, Lord Harrogate was worth looking at for his own sake ; but Ethel had never thus looked upon him until she found herself thus confronted with him in the mist, as her rescuer from certain suffering, perhaps from death.

"If you are able to walk, Miss Gray," said Lord Harrogate earnestly, "will you take my arm and lean on me ? My servant will charge himself with the child here ; indeed I do not think he can do better than to set her on the pony, as she seems so tired. We must all of us rely on Bates's guidance to get clear of the waste. Happily he is a

thorough moorman, and can pick his way where I should be at fault."

"Ay, ay, my Lord," returned Bates, flattered by the compliment, but honestly unwilling to be pranked in borrowed plumage. "But if we were t' other side o' Pinkney Ridge or Cranmere way, I'd not be so gey ready to take the lead in a fog like this one. I've heard of moormen straying round and round, and lying down to die in a drift within gunshot o' their own house-door. But we were on the hard path just now, so if we can but strike it again, we're safe."

They started, Betty Mudge perched sideways on the pony, which the keeper led; while Ethel, in spite of her protestation that she could walk unaided, was glad to avail herself of the support of Lord Harrogate's arm. It was not all plain sailing, for so dense was the fog that even the

experienced keeper was puzzled for a time, until his sharp ear caught the well-known babble of a brook.

“’Tis running water!” cried Bates in triumph. “Safest plan on the moor is to follow running water, for that won’t deceive. We’ll win through it.”

And indeed a short half-hour brought the party to the firm high-road, with the gates of High Tor Park, topped by their stone wyverns, within sight. Betty Mudge, who announced herself as having an aunt in the village at whose cottage she could pass the night, was despatched under convoy to that relative’s abode. But Ethel Gray looked so worn and ill, that Lord Harrogate insisted on her retaining his arm up the carriage-drive leading to the house, where she could receive the attention her state required.

“My mother and sisters will take care of



you, I know," he said, as he supported her slow steps through the park, where the fog, so dense upon the frowning hills above, only floated in fitful wreaths. The house was reached, and great was the surprise of those within when Lord Harrogate appeared with Ethel, pale, patient, exhausted, but beautiful still, her dark hair and her dress dripping with wet, leaning on his strong arm. The Countess was kind; and her daughters, beautiful golden-haired Lady Gladys, honest-eyed earnest Lady Maud, even Lady Alice, a clever child of twelve, were still more kind. A bright wood-fire was soon blazing in what was called the Yellow Room; and Ethel, seated as near to the crackling logs as her chair could be placed, and propped up with cushions, was able to dry her wet tresses and drenched garments; while Lord Harrogate's sisters, and Lady Maud in especial, pressed

her to partake of tea and other refreshments, and spoke soothingly to her, and were very full of tender womanly sympathy.

Lady Maud, the Earl's second daughter, knew the new school-mistress better than did the others, and liked her. She was herself a constant visitor at the school-house, and had heard many and many an urchin stammer through his or her lessons there, and could therefore the better appreciate the motive which had led Ethel into her late danger, through a natural wish to comfort little Lenny on his bed of fever. Warmth, and that kindliness of manner which women shew more than we do, did much towards bringing Ethel back from that death-in-life which excessive fatigue and chill tend to produce; and when the carriage was, in spite of her remonstrance, 'ordered round,' to convey her home to the school, she had

strength enough to walk unaided to the door. Lord Harrogate had disappeared. The Earl had not as yet returned from some meeting of magistrates. "I will come down to see you, Miss Gray, to-morrow, if I can," said Lady Maud, as the carriage drove off.

## CHAPTER VI.

### SIR SYKES MAKES AN ANNOUNCEMENT.

"LUCY, my dear, and Blanche too, I want to know how you would like to receive here, at Carbery, a young lady who is a total stranger to all of us ; but who, if she comes at all, comes with a distinct understanding that this house, until she marries, is her home. I ask you this, my dears, because I have received a letter"—and the baronet pointed to a black-bordered envelope that lay, with others, beside his plate—"inclosing one penned long ago, by a hand which can write no more. George Willis—Major, when he died, in the Indian army—was one of my

earliest and truest friends. He is dead now. He left behind him this one girl, his only and motherless child, and—and he begs me, in a letter, indorsed ‘After my death to be forwarded to Sir Sykes Denzil,’ to become the guardian of this—this poor orphaned thing. How do you say, my girls? Shall we have her here at Carbery, or not?”

It was very neatly and prettily put on the part of Sir Sykes, and the appeal was all the more effective because of the quietude and cool indifference of the baronet’s ordinary manner. He was a cold, unemotional person, in the everyday routine of life; and hence the quivering of his lips, the faltering of his voice, added much of pathos to what might otherwise have seemed commonplace.

As for the answer to the question asked, could there be a doubt of it! It is to the credit of a woman’s heart that it always,

when a plea is well urged, responds to the Open Sesamé of compassion. They may not, as men do, seek out hidden wrongs to be righted and unseen pangs to be assuaged. But the distress that lies at their door they seek to comfort ; and had the young ladies of Carbery been very much poorer than they were, their reply to their father's question would have been as generously outspoken.

“ By all means, yes, papa, let us have the poor girl here—this Miss—Willis I think is her name ; and we will try to make her happy. How sad ! ” And Blanche and Lucy were all but in tears over the woes of this Anglo-Indian orphan ; while Jasper, hiding his face behind his coffee-cup, reflected that ‘ the governor ’ was a cool hand, and did his little bit of acting in a manner worthy of Barnum himself.

In most houses of sufficient dignity to

own a special letter-bag, the temporary office of post-master is publicly discharged. The old Earl of Wolverhampton, for instance, found it pleasant to sort and classify the motley mass of correspondence which came daily to High Tor; but he would almost as soon have opened a servant's letter as have opened the bag otherwise than in the presence of guests and kindred. Carbery Chase, however, was not High Tor, and Sir Sykes Denzil was a very different family chief from his noble neighbour. The baronet was an early riser, as are many men who have spent much of their lives in India; and he chose that the post-bag should be brought to him in the library an hour or so before the usual assembling for breakfast. Jasper, who was of a suspicious temper, resented this exercise of

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parental authority; but he was wrong. There may have been passages in Sir Sykes's life which would not, if published, have redounded to his credit, but tampering with letters was not congenial to him. He never gave a second glance to any envelope addressed to Captain Denzil or the captain's sisters, and was as loyal a custodian of the family correspondence as any gentleman in the whole county of Devon. There was this advantage in the baronet's habit as regarded the post-bag, that nobody could tell what letters Sir Sykes received or when he did receive them. There are many of us, and those not the least loved or esteemed, whose letters are as it were public property, and with whom reticence on the subject of a missive newly received by the post would diffuse disquiet and perhaps dismay



through the domestic circle. Sir Sykes had never been one of those who wear their hearts, metaphorically, on their sleeves; he told those around him as much as he wished them to know, and no more.

There was quite a flutter of pleasurable excitement among the Denzil girls at the prospect of a new member of the household, a new face at Carbery. They were sorry for this poor Miss Willis, sorrier for her by far than for the many orphans whose bereavement is notified to us every day by a grim list of deaths dryly chronicled in the newspaper. And they felt doubly disposed to welcome her and be good to her in that she was lonely and sad, and that her presence would introduce a new element into Carbery. They made no sacrifice in giving a cheerful acquiescence

to their father's suggestion that his ward should be received beneath his roof. In such a house the maintenance of an extra inmate was of no moment at all. But had Sir Sykes been living in furnished lodgings, and forced to look twice at half-a-crown, those honest girls would still not have grudged a share of their hashed mutton and scanty house-room to the daughter of an old friend of their father's.

"I don't think, sir, that I remember to have heard you mention the Major's name," said Jasper, stolidly buttering his toast, but furtively eyeing his father from beneath his pale eyelashes.

"I think you have heard it," answered Sir Sykes, with a self-possession that all but staggered Jasper's unbelief. "We were quartered together for years at Allahabad, Cawnpore, and Lahore. There were Rey-

nolds and L'Estrange, and Moreton who is living yet, and this poor fellow Willis; the old set, with whom I was intimate. I don't often bore listeners who have never been in India with the details of my Eastern experiences, else I think that the name of Major—or Captain—George Willis would be tolerably familiar here.”

That the girls, in their newly-awakened interest, should ask questions was but natural. But their father had not very much beyond the substance of his original announcement to communicate. He had, he said, but a vague recollection of Mrs. Willis, his friend's wife, a bride when Sir Sykes returned to Europe, and who had now been dead for some years. She was a quiet domestic little person, from Wales or Ireland, the baronet did not know which; and she had some pittance of annual income,

which would no doubt go to her child at the husband's decease. Major Willis had no private means, at least so Sir Sykes thought. There was a London lawyer, however, who knew all about the financial affairs of the orphan, and who would of course render a proper statement to the baronet's solicitors. Miss Willis would be entitled, as the child of an Indian officer, to no pension, being, as Sir Sykes understood, over the age of twenty-one; but of that again he was not sure, not being certain of the exact age of his friend's daughter. She had no very near relatives, and had never, to Sir Sykes's knowledge, been in England before.

"It was the chaplain of the military station who wrote," continued Sir Sykes, "inclosing in his letter that which poor Willis had left for myself; and unless I

telegraph to veto the arrangement, you are likely to see Miss Ruth—did I say that her name was Ruth—very soon, since she is to start by the next mail from Bombay.”

“Well,” muttered Jasper to himself, as some time later in the morning he sauntered through the plantations, the path across which made a short cut from Carbery Chase to Lord Wolverhampton’s park at High Tor, “I have seen some cool hands; but—— Well, well! It was neatly done, very neatly. If the governor had not had the rare luck to come into a fortune, he would have been as fit to make one as any man I ever came across.”

The young man, whose preference for crooked ways was congenital, and who knew of no road to Fortune’s temple save miry and devious ones, began really to feel an admiration for his father’s abilities, since

he had discovered to what profound depths of dissimulation the baronet could descend. His own craft had enabled him to lift a corner of the fair seeming mask which Sir Sykes wore before the world, but as yet his knowledge was too imperfect to enable its possessor to make capital of the secret. Could he once——

“Why, Captain Denzil!” exclaimed a ringing girlish voice, “I could almost give you credit for poetic reveries, so complete is your unconsciousness of the mere commonplace world around you. You had all but passed us without a word or a bow.”

Jasper could not repress a slight start, as he found himself in presence of the three Ladies De Vere and of their brother Lord Harrogate, in the main avenue of the park. The young man’s moody countenance brightened at once.

"I am not, as a rule, greatly given to dreaming in broad daylight, Lady Gladys," he said good-humouredly; "and as for the poetry, I'll promise to dedicate my first volume of sonnets, or whatever they call them, to yourself. I am afraid, though, you will have to wait a little before I take a plunge into literature."

"Of books—of a sort, you have been rather a diligent compiler," said Lord Harrogate, smiling.

Jasper bit his lip; but it was in a careless tone that he rejoined: "That's only too true; but let me tell you, Harrogate, there goes more of hard thinking to the composition of a betting-book than people usually suppose.—I was on my way to the house, meaning to inflict a little of my dulness on you, Lady Maud, but you are early abroad."

"Yes; and you may as well walk down with us," said Lady Maud. "We are going to the school, to see how my friend, Miss Grey, the school-mistress, fares after her moorland adventure of Saturday. You heard of it, Captain Denzil?"

No; Jasper had not heard of it. And on receiving an account of it from Lady Maud's lips, the captain said, with never so little of a sneer, that the episode was "quite romantic."

"Come and see the heroine of it," said bright-eyed Lady Gladys; "and you, who affect to admire nothing, will be compelled to admit that you have seen a face such as we very seldom behold except in a picture."

The party walked on together thus chatting until they reached the village. The young people of the two great houses,



High Tor and Carbery Chase, had naturally been well acquainted with one another from an early period; and the two elder of the De Vere girls were disposed to pity Jasper rather than to blame him for the recklessness that had brought about his exile from the haunts of fashion. But the captain knew that Lord Harrogate and he were uncongenial spirits. He did not like Harrogate, and he had a shrewd idea that Harrogate despised him. We cannot, however, be very eclectic in the depths of the country as regards those with whom we associate, and hence these two young men, of natures so dissimilar, tolerated one another because of the ancient friendship existing between their families.

The school was reached, and Ethel its mistress, still pale, but lovely as one of the white roses in her tiny garden, came for-

ward to receive her distinguished visitors, and paid her tribute of thanks to Lord Harrogate for the service he had rendered her, with a modest grace which was all the more charming from its extreme simplicity of words and manner.

“I was too weak and faint the other evening, my Lord, to say what I felt as to your—your great kindness.”

And a princess could not have spoken better. It was Lord Harrogate who seemed embarrassed, as your honest Briton, gentle or simple, is embarrassed by being thanked. And then, while Lady Maud eagerly told how jelly and hothouse fruit and port wine had been despatched from High Tor to the moorland cottage for the benefit of little Lenny Mudge, and how the parish doctor spoke hopefully of his small patient, Jasper looked at Ethel Gray with a sort of wonder,

as at the most beautiful woman that he had ever seen, and the most thoroughly a lady, not even excepting Lady Gladys De Vere. But he said nothing, and lounged carelessly off with the party when adieus had been exchanged with Miss Gray.



HELENA  
LADY HARROGATE

## CHAPTER VII.

### A NEW FACE AT CARBERY.

"SHE be coming for sure. Carriage, with second coachman, just getting ready for a start to Dundleton, to meet the down train at 9.17," said a pink-faced youth, whose stature and chest measurement would have procured for him the interested admiration of a sergeant-major in Her Majesty's Brigade of Guards, but who was as yet but imperfect in his domestic drill as third footman at Carbery Chase.

"What's 9.17?" demanded the mature female addressed, with some asperity, as she dredged flour over some cunningly com-

pounded mess simmering beside the fire in the back-kitchen. "Can't you give a body the time o' the day? They didn't cut it so fine when I was your age, young chap!"

And indeed it is marvellous to note how the junior population throughout Western Christendom appears to have learned to think and speak by railway time, and to have been, as it were, inoculated by Bradshaw.

"Thought you knowed all that'n, cook!" half-sulkily, half-apologetically rejoined the gigantic hobbledehoy, mindful of that functionary's empire over the roasts, subject of course to the high fiat of Monsieur Cornichon, the white-capped and black-bearded *chef*.

"Anyhow, this Miss Whatshername 'll be here soon after eleven."

"Willis is her name, and she comes from the Ingees," put in a tart young town-made

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house-maid. "I wonder if she's black?" This quasi-witticism provoked a titter among the rest of the under-servants there collected; for anything was welcome that could excuse a laugh; and besides, a new recruit to the aristocracy of the waited-upon is sure to be smartly criticised by the plebs of those who wait.

"*I wonder*," said the old sub-cook, stirring her saucepan, "if she'll be setting her cap at young Mr. Jasper?"

"The captain knows too well on which side his bread is buttered," pronounced the gaunt housemaid-in-chief, an invaluable female, lynx-eyed for spiders' webs, and vigilant as to the minutest details of bedroom duty.

Opinions at Carbery Chase were very much divided as to the new-comer's exact status and claims to consideration. There



were those who invidiously described her as 'Sir Sykes's charity child,' and appeared to regard her as a species of genteel mendicant most foolishly invited down to Devonshire. There were others who were not sorry for the arrival of any one considered capable of lending animation to a house where the regular routine of every-day life ran on with somewhat sluggish flow. And there were a few philosophers in plush or white aprons, much flouted by the rest, who held that Sir Sykes was himself the best judge as to what guests, permanent or temporary, should be allowed to share the shelter of his roof at Carbery.

That there was enough and to spare in that opulent mansion which acknowledged Sir Sykes Denzil for its master, was patent to all. Large as was Sir Sykes's household and handsome his expenditure (for how

many baronets chronicled in the gilt-edged volumes of Messrs. Dod and Debrett, can afford themselves the luxury of a third and fourth footman, a French *chef* like high-salaried M. Cornichon, and a groom of the chambers ?), he was known to live within his income ; and was rumoured by his inferiors to be guilty of the offence, never mentioned otherwise than with a resentful reverence, of ‘putting by.’ Sir Sykes’s men and maids were probably not students of Dean Swift’s ironical advice to their order ; but we may rely on it that the servants of Dives himself had strongly defined ideas as to the proportion of high feasting that should accompany the purple and fine linen of their patron.

Meanwhile, in spite of the early training which is supposed to make an Englishman of Sir Sykes Denzil’s degree as outwardly impassive as a Red Indian, no one at

Carbery appeared to think so much about the arrival of Miss Willis as did the baronet himself. Her coming did not now at any rate partake of the character of a surprise, for weeks had naturally elapsed between the incoming of the late and that of the new mail, and there had been time enough for preparations, if such were necessary. Sir Sykes, however, on the morning of his ward's arrival could not avoid, not merely the being nervous and anxious, but the exhibiting to all who cared to look of his inexplicable nervousness and unreasonable anxiety. He went and came at frequent and irregular intervals between his own traditional apartment the library, and that morning-room where his daughter's usually sat over their sketches and lacework and china-painting, and all those laborious trifles on which young ladies employ their taper fingers.

That their father was undignified in his apparently uncalled-for agitation as to the Indian orphan's arrival, was too evident not to be recognised by even the most dutiful of daughters. But both Blanche and Lucy willingly accounted for the baronet's restlessness on the ground of the revival of early associations, acting on the nerves of one whose health was no longer robust.

"Let her only come here and quietly drop into her place among us," said the elder sister to the younger; "and depend upon it, papa will find her presence at Carbery as unexciting as though she were a supplementary daughter returning 'for good,' as the girls call it, from a boarding-school."

Jasper could, had it so pleased him, have considerably enlightened the ignorance of his unsuspecting sisters. But the captain prudently said nothing, and did not osten-

sibly keep watch upon his father's actions, or deviate much from his own habit of indolently hanging about the stables, the kennels wherein sleek pointers and shaggy retrievers howled and rattled their chains, the billiard-room, and other resorts of ingenuous youth. The baronet's nervousness was not in itself surprising to him, in whose memory was fresh the conversation which he had overheard while lurking in the mean garden of *The Traveller's Rest*; but he could only conjecture what might be the hidden springs that prompted a course of conduct difficult to reconcile with a clean conscience and a secure worldly position.

"I never," said Jasper to himself musingly, as he knocked about the balls on the billiard-table, "heard a word against the governor. He was awfully needy and that sort of thing

once, of course ; but I never knew there to be a whisper of any sharp practice either at *écarté* or with the bones. Had there been such, some good-natured fellow or other about the clubs would have let fall a hint of it before now in my hearing, or some servant would have tattled, when I wore a jacket and was Master Jasper. He's not much liked, my father, but respected he is. I doubt if many, who fluked by a lucky chance upon a great fortune, get so civilly spoken of behind their backs."

Jasper was not one to have cherished those tender recollections of infantine joys and sorrows, which with some men remain green and fresh to the last. He had, to use his own expression, to 'hark back' with painful effort and purpose, ere he could reproduce before his mental vision the long past of his early boyhood. "I have a vague

notion," said he, after an interval of this appeal to memory, "that my mother gave me more sweetmeats than were good for me, and that she, and I too, seemed to stand in awe of my father. I'm sure I don't know why, unless it were because he was serious and silent—a grave Spanish Don, as I used to think. But she said too that he had been of a livelier mood once, and something about his high spirits having deserted him just when the world began to smile. My old nurse—what was her name, I wonder?—Wiggins, Priggins—all nurses are named something of the sort, and all combine to dote over the little wretches that torment them—used to talk about the governor's sad looks dating from the loss of that young sister of mine. She would have been younger than Lucy, older than Blanche, I take it. But why, in the name of common

sense, a man of the world should never forget the loss of a chit in the nursery—that is, if it was all on the square—but then, again, the motive!” And the captain’s arching eyebrows and the compression of his thin lips were very expressive of his readiness to believe the very worst that could be believed as to his nearest and dearest, if only a plausible reason for such villainy could be alleged. “If it had been myself now,” he muttered, as he sent the red ball, with a mechanical precision that proved him a dexterous pool-player, into pocket after pocket of the green table; “but even then the governor, who had Apollyon’s own luck, did not need to cut off the entail by illegal methods. He’s no life-tenant of Carbery, as he makes me feel whenever our views don’t exactly coincide; could leave it to my sisters; or back again, if he chose, to



the De Vere lot ; and so, what interest he could have had in spiriting away little Mabel Denzil, is a question that I defy Œdipus, or a modern racing prophet, to answer." Having said which, the captain rang the bell for something to drink, drank that something, and immersed his fine faculties in the delightful study of a sporting newspaper.

Jasper had not had leisure to thread his way very far through the labyrinth of darkling vaticinations, so dear to men who like himself are of the horse, horsey, as to probable or certain winners of important events to come off, or to discriminate with sufficient nicety between the inherent truth or falsehood of the reports that made the barometer of the betting world oscillate so wildly between panic and exultation, before the grinding of wheels on the smooth gravel

announced the arrival of the carriage, and that Sir Sykes's ward was at the threshold of Carbery Court, her future home.

"I'd give a trifle," thought Jasper, "to know how many throbs to the minute the governor's pulse is giving just now. I suppose, like a pattern guardian, he will receive her in the hall. I'll wait till the first disjointed welcomes are over, and then drop in and inspect the new importation. I wonder if she drinks rum, like her brother?"

The captain had drawn, mentally, a fancy portrait of Hold's sister, and had marvelled how Blanche and Lucy would be likely to get on with such a one as she could scarcely fail to be. But at the very first glance Jasper abandoned as untenable the conjecture that Miss Willis could drink rum, and he owned to himself, with the candour which men of his stamp exhibit in self-

communing alone, how very wide of the mark was the likeness which his imagination had traced.

Miss Willis was very short and slight, and the deep mourning which she wore made her look even slighter and shorter than she really was. She had jet black hair that curled naturally, which, as if in ignorance or defiance of fashion, she wore in a crop, and which made the whiteness of her skin seem more conspicuous than it would otherwise have done. A pale little face, lit up by a pair of fine dark eyes, that drooped modestly to the carpet, as suitable to her shy, timid air. Whether she were pretty or the reverse, was not to be so summarily settled as is the case with most of her sex.

It was the eyes, and the eyes alone, that lent a marked peculiarity to the countenance of Sir Sykes's ward. Look at them, and the

verdict that Miss Willis was charming would have been pronounced by many women and most men. Confine the scrutiny to the other features, and the judgment that the Indian orphan was a plain, pale little creature, would as inevitably have resulted. She looked young, quite a girl. The delicate smoothness of her cheek suggested that her age might be under twenty ; but there was a subdued thoughtfulness in her aspect that might have harmonised well with her years, had she been older by a lustrum.

“I was talking of *Œdipus*,” such was Jasper’s soliloquy after a half-hour spent in the new arrival’s company ; “but here is the *Sphynx* herself, by Jove !”

It was with an inexpressible sentiment of relief that the baronet saw what style of person his ward appeared to be. Here were no solecisms in breeding, no coarseness of

tone, or affectations more painful than honest roughness ever is, to wince at, to gloss over, to excuse on the ground of a youth spent in a far country, and often in stations where European society was scarce, and perhaps not always choice as regarded its quality. Sir Sykes had reckoned, at best, on a probationary period during which he should have had to play the irksome part of an apologist for the shortcomings of her whom he had invited to be the companion of his own daughters.

But Sir Sykes and Jasper, too, were forced to admit that Miss Willis was either an actress of consummate address, or, what really seemed the more probable, was merely appearing in her genuine character. Timid and somewhat constrained, but not awkward, was her manner of responding to the warm greeting of Sir Sykes's two daughters,

and to the grave urbanity of the baronet himself. She did not say much; but her voice trembled when she thanked Sir Sykes for his 'extreme kindness' to a stranger like herself. Then Blanche kissed her. She should not be a stranger long, she said. And then the girl broke down, sobbing. "How good you all are to me," she said. "I hope—I do hope not to be very troublesome, not to"—

And then there were more tears and more kissing; and the Misses Denzil took complete possession of their new friend, and bore her off to be installed in her room, and to learn to be at home at Carbery. Nothing could have gone off better than the orphan's reception; and even Jasper felt this, and forbore to sneer. His own heart was as hard as the nether millstone; but he accepted the fact that

his sisters possessed organs of a different degree of sensibility, precisely as he owned that roses had perfume, and that the thrushes and nightingales sang sweetly in the garden.

“She’s no more the sister of yonder pirate fellow,” such was the captain’s conclusion, “than the last Derby winner was a drayhorse. I thought the rascal spoke mockingly of the relationship between her and him. No; she’s not Hold’s sister. I wonder whether she is mine?”

In the course of the afternoon of that day, Lord Harrogate, who had ridden over from High Tor, made his appearance. There was, as has been mentioned, a frequent exchange of neighbourly communications between the two great houses of the vicinity. The Earl, it is true, seldom called upon Sir Sykes, and Sir Sykes as seldom on

the Earl; but the Countess was often at Carbery, and the young people of both families were much in each other's company. By the time of Lord Harrogate's visit, the girl from India had made considerable progress in winning the good-will of the Misses Denzil, prepossessed in her favour from the beginning. They had devoted the time since luncheon to shewing her the lions of Carbery—the tapestry of the 'Queen's Chamber,' faded but sumptuous; the stained glass; the chapel; the pictures; the grand conservatory, built by a former lord of Carbery, on a scale too ambitious for the use of a private family, and which was kept up at a cost which even Sir Sykes murmured at; and the other local curiosities.

The orphan had proved herself a patient and intelligent sight-seer, willing to be



pleased, thankful for the kind desire of her entertainers that she should be pleased, and discriminating in her admiration. There was still some constraint in her manner, and of herself and her former life she scarcely spoke. Perhaps her loss was too recent for her to be able to talk freely of India, while of the journey to England she said little. "There were fellow-passengers who took much care of me," she replied once, in answer to a question on Lucy's part. "Indeed, I met kindness on every hand. Perhaps my being alone, and my black frock"—And then her eyes filled with tears and she turned her head away.

Lord Harrogate, when introduced to the baronet's ward, experienced one of the oddest sensations that he had ever felt, and akin to that tantalising, nameless thrill

with which we all sometimes fancy that we have seen some place which we know ourselves to visit for the first time, or witnessed some scene which never before met our eyes. He had started, when first he saw Miss Willis, and had eyed her in the inquiring fashion in which we scan a face familiar to us. But it was evident that Miss Willis did not know him, as indeed it was impossible that she, Indian born and bred, and now in England for the first time, should know him. And yet, long after he had left Carbery, the perplexing thought occurred to him again and again that he remembered the face, which, as all could aver, he had beheld for the first time on that day.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

“Now, Denzil, let us understand one another. I shall take it very kindly, dear boy, if you will do as I ask you in this matter. After all, it is no such extraordinary service that I crave at your hands. You have ridden a horse of mine, if my memory be good for anything, before to-day.” The speaker, who, for the convenience of a more distinct articulation, had withdrawn the cigar from between his lips, leaned back in his easy-chair, as if to mark the effect of his words upon the visitor to whom he had addressed them. He was

himself a gentleman of a portly presence and rubicund face, much taller and much heavier than his former friend and brother-officer. And whereas Jasper wore a civilian's suit of speckled tweed, Captain Prodgers shewed by his gold-laced overalls and braided tunic that he was still in the army.

The famous Lancer regiment to which Jasper had once belonged having changed their quarters from Coventry to Exeter, Captain Denzil had called upon his old comrades. There had been a champagne luncheon in honour of the late commander of No. 6 Troop; and on leaving the mess-room, Jasper had gone with his former intimate Jack Prodgers, to smoke a quiet cigar in his, Jack's room.

"We're old friends, sure enough," returned Jasper meditatively, as he watched the spiral wreaths of smoke curling upwards—"and I

do not like to be disobliging ; but I can but repeat that I would rather not ride. My father would be vexed if I did."

"And you are a very good boy, as we know ; quite a pattern of filial decorum !" growled out the big man in the gold-laced overalls.

"That style of argument has no weight with me, Jack," returned Jasper, with imperturbable good-humour. "I am no stripling, like one of your newly-joined, pink-faced cornets, to be goaded by a sneer into acting contrary to my judgment. And I don't mind owning that I am on my good behaviour at Carbery just now, and would rather not, please, do anything of which Sir Sykes would disapprove."

"It would be well worth your while," urged his host, striking his spurred heel into the ragged carpet ; "worth any

man's while who was not, like young Mash the brewer, my new subaltern, born with a gold-spoon in his mouth. There are sixty-seven horses entered for the race, and we could share the stakes between us, if we win."

"Yes—if we win!" returned Jasper with a laugh that was almost insolent. "I have pretty well made up my mind, though, to renounce the character of gentleman rider for some time to come."

"And quite right too! but there may be an exception—may there not—to so strict a rule?" cheerfully replied the other captain, as he arose and busied himself in the concoction of some curious beverage, in which transparent ice and dry champagne, powdered sugar and sliced cucumber, strawberries and maraschino, were amalgamated into a harmonious whole. "I shan't as yet

take 'No' for an answer, or give up the hope that you will stand by an old friend like myself in a matter which that old friend has very much at heart. With you in the saddle, I should feel victory certain."

Confidence is strangely infectious. Jasper knew by the ring of his friend's voice that he was very much in earnest, and began for the first time to consider that there must be some hidden reason for the cavalry officer's unprecedented pertinacity.

Captain John Prodgers was in his own line a typical officer of a class to be found in more than one fashionable regiment. Living as he had always done amongst men of rank and fortune, he had thriven somehow by dint of better brains and readier assurance than fell to the lot of his companions. No one knew whence he came. His origin seemed to date from

the gazetting of his commission, and indeed he might be presumed, like a sort of regimental Minerva, to have sprung booted and armed into existence. Nobody had known him as a boy, but the grandest doors in London opened to let him in. Related to nobody of Pall-Mall repute, he was 'Jack Prodgers' to a dozen of Lord Georges and Lord Alfreds. The earthen pot swam gaily down the stream along with those of double-gilt metal, and it was certainly not the former that had suffered from any casual collisions.

"It certainly is queer," remarked Jasper, sipping his first glass of the newly-brewed compound, "that sixty-seven horses should be entered for a quiet insignificant affair like our local steeple-chase. Pebworth, it strikes me, must blush to find itself famous. I for one am quite at a loss to account for



the sudden interest which we Devonshire folks appear to have inspired in what is generally a tame rustic contest."

Jack Prodgers, as he slowly sipped the cool contents of his huge green glass, smiled with an affable pride in the possession of superior knowledge, which was not lost upon his friend.

"You are not the only one, rely on it, Denzil, to make that remark," he said complacently. "Many a youngster who thinks he shews a precocious manliness by studying the sporting papers and talking of matters of which he knows as little as I do of Greek, is marvelling at the attention paid to a petty race at your father's park-gates.—Look here," he added, handing to Jasper a newspaper carefully folded down: "you see in that paragraph the latest intelligence. Two of the finest horses in England—The

Smasher and Brother to Highflyer—are positively to appear at Pebworth. They are the favourites of course. Nobody condescends to give a thought for the present to the humble chances of my Irish mare, whose name you may notice near the bottom of the list. Now, will you ride Norah Creina?”

“She’ll never gallop with Brother to Highflyer,” said Jasper decisively.

“Umph! perhaps not,” was her owner’s dry answer, and there was something in the tone which made Jasper arch his languid eyebrows.

“I say, Prodgers,” said Jasper, after a pause for reflection, “what do you want me for, in particular? I can ride, but so can others. Why not choose a heavy-weight jockey; or if you prefer it, some first-rate amateur like Sandiman, or Lark,

or Spurrier of the Hussars, men who make a living by putting their necks in jeopardy?"

"Because a professional jockey would betray my confidence," answered Prodgers frankly; "and as for your gentlemen riders, well, well! It is a fine line, imperceptible sometimes, that separates the amateur from the hired jockey. Spurrier is as honest as the day—that I admit; but then he is one of those impracticable men who disregard hints and will not be dictated to. I don't exactly wish to be brilliantly beaten, and to draw a big cheque by way of payment for the beating. No. My hope is in yourself."

"I haven't seen the mare, you know," said Jasper, hesitating.

"She is not a beauty," replied Prodgers; "nor will you like her better for seeing

her, as you can of course before you leave. A great ugly fiddle-headed animal she is, Jasper. The man who sold her to me at Kildare, candidly admitted that there was not a single good point about her. You will not be pleased with her heavy head, awkward joints, and straggling build. No wonder that the notion of her success is scouted. *Will* you ride Norah Creina?"

Jasper, himself no novice, was excessively perplexed. He had a high esteem for the shrewdness of his knowing friend, and he liked Prodgers too as much as it was in his nature to like any man. While still in the regiment and in the heyday of his brief prosperity, the elder captain had been kind to him, warning him against some at least of the snares that beset careless youth, and winning but very little of his money. And here was his former Mentor actually impor-

tunate in his solicitude that Jasper should ride a hideous and undervalued quadruped, on the defects of which its proprietor expatiated with incomprehensible delight.

"The Irish mare is fast, then?" said Jasper, bewildered.

Prodgers smiled mysteriously. "Why, we've finished the cup," he said. "Here, Tomkins; get some more ice, and"—

"No, no; thank you," said Jasper, rising with flushed cheeks. "I have had enough, and it is time for me to be moving. But before I go to the railway station, I will take a peep at this phenomenon of yours, Prodgers, if you please." The stable was visited accordingly; and Jasper, who had been prepared to see something ugly, found the reality to surpass his imagination.

"Queer-looking creature, isn't she? Lengthy as a crocodile, clumsy, and rough-

coated in spite of grooming," remarked Prodgers. "I think I never saw a thoroughbred shew so few signs of breeding. Why, the white feet alone would disgust most judges of a horse."

All this the owner of the Irish mare said in cheerful chuckling tones, rubbing his hands together the while, as if he spoke in jest. But Jasper Denzil, who knew enough of his friend to be aware that he was altogether incapable of an expensive joke, such as sending a worthless animal to the starting-post would be, and who was sufficiently experienced in horses to know how little can be known about them, began to entertain a profound distrust of his own judgment.

"About fit, after all, for a railway omnibus," said Prodgers. "Here we are at the station. Your train, eh? We've just saved it."

"Well, I'll ride for you, Jack," said Jasper as he took his seat.

"All right, dear boy. I'll send you a line about arrangements," was the answer.

And so the confederates parted.

Jasper Denzil's heart was lighter as he drove briskly through the grand avenue at Carbery Chase (he had left his groom and tandem at Pebworth to await his return) than it had been of late. The stagnation of his recent life in the Devonshire manor-house had been agreeably disturbed. He seemed for a time to have again a share in what was to him the real world of thought and action—of no very elevated thoughts or noble actions, but such as suited him—and to be again something more than heir-apparent to a baronetcy and heir-presumptive to an estate.

"I wonder now," muttered Jasper, as he brought his equipage at an easy swinging

trot up the smooth road, "what is the peculiarity of yonder ugly animal, or why I, of all men, should be chosen out to ride her? The whole thing is a riddle. However, my father won't so much object to my wearing the silk jacket once more, to oblige an old brother-officer."

The captain alighted in excellent spirits. On his dressing-table, however, lay two or three letters, the sight of one of which, in its pale bluish envelope, checked the current of his complacency in full tide. A glance at the handwriting confirmed Jasper's worst suspicions.

"Wilkins it is!" he said, taking it up between his finger and thumb, as a naturalist might handle a small snake, the non-venomous character of which was as yet imperfectly ascertained.

Amongst the paraphernalia of Captain



Denzil's dressing-table, the ivory-backed brushes, the gold-stoppered jars and scent-bottles of red Bohemian glass, was a silver hunting-flask, the top of which, being unscrewed, became a silver drinking-cup. Jasper filled the cup twice, and tossed off the cherry-brandy almost fiercely, as a hungry dog naps up a morsel of meat. Then he opened the letter. This was short, and was signed 'Enoch Wilkins, Solicitor.' It is not, I am told, usual for solicitors-at-law to append 'Solicitor' to their names. But Mr. Wilkins, whose clients were of a slippery and shifty sort, deemed it to his advantage to remind his correspondents of his profession.

The writer 'begged to remind Captain Denzil' that certain acceptances were now overdue, and could not, to the great regret of Mr. Enoch Wilkins, be again renewed. This

being the case, a prompt settlement of outstanding accounts became urgent; and Mr. Wilkins, aware of the inconvenience and misunderstanding to which a correspondence by letter too often gave rise, desired a personal interview with Captain Jasper Denzil, and would therefore wait on him at Carbery Chase, or meet him, if preferred, at Pebworth or Exeter, on say July 28th, a day on which Mr. Enoch Wilkins could absent himself from his London office. Finally, Mr. Wilkins requested a reply from Captain Denzil as to the trysting-place that would best tally with the captain's engagements.

"July 28, eh?" said Jasper thoughtfully. "Odd, isn't it, that my legal friend should have chosen the very day of the steeple-chase! Well! if Jack's confidence is but justified by the result, I may come off

victorious in one encounter, however I may do in the other."

He then caught up a pen, and proceeded to indite, painfully and slowly—as is the wont of so-called men of pleasure when compelled to write—an answer to the lawyer's letter, wherein he declared his willingness to await Mr. Wilkins at the *De Vere Arms* at Pebworth, at four in the afternoon of July 28.

Having sealed and addressed the envelope, Jasper tilted into the silver top of the flask what little of the cherry-brandy the latter still held, drank it off at a draught, and proceeded to dress for dinner; quite unaware that he was the unconscious instrument in the forging of another iron link in the dread chain from Fate's own anvil.

## CHAPTER IX.

### SIR SYKES'S WARD.

THERE may be pleasanter positions in life than that of a dependant, especially when the claim to make one of the household rests on conditions which it is impossible to define. The governess, who is so often held up by moralists as an object for our conventional pity, needs not, surely, to forfeit her self-respect, inasmuch as she earns her salary and its contingent benefits by honest labour. The companion, too, gives valuable consideration in the shape of a perpetual offering up of her own time, tastes, and wishes, for her pay and maintenance. There are others some-

times, however, kindred strangers within the rich man's gates, who have no ostensible tasks to perform, who cannot give monthly or quarterly notice and go away, and yet whose bread is sometimes made very bitter to them—white slaves who get no compassion from the world at large.

Miss Willis at Carbery Chase was oddly situated. An orphan, she found herself domiciled amongst those who were allied to her neither by blood nor by the still more tenacious tie of common and early associations. She was exempt of course under that roof from many of the annoyances which fall to the lot of the motherless elsewhere. There was no domineering mistress of the house to resent every attention shewn to the interloper as something deducted from the rightful due of her own matchless girls; no niggard to grudge

her every meal of which she partook at the stinted family table; or tyrant to pile upon her submissive shoulders the never-ending load of petty cares, which some genteel drudges perform unthanked.

At Carbery there was plenty and to spare. Sir Sykes was a gentleman bland and courteous; the girls as kind good girls as could easily be met with; and the servants sufficiently well trained to take their cue from their employers, and to be civil to one who was smiled on by the higher powers. Yet a sensitive young lady in the position which Sir Sykes's ward now occupied, might well have been excused if her heart at times was somewhat heavy. All her old habits of life had been in a moment uprooted. She had been suddenly transferred from familiar scenes and people whose ways she understood, to a country

every feature of which must have been strange and new to her. Under the circumstances and in spite of the good-nature of those around her, it is not surprising if Ruth Willis at times looked sad and pensive.

"You cannot think how wonderful it seemed to me at first," she said one day to the younger Miss Denzil, "not to hear the drums beat tattoo at sun-down, or how often I have started from my pillow in the early morning, fancying that I heard again the bugles sounding for the parade. Then the trumpeting of the elephants beside the tank, and the shrill voices of the dusky children at play beneath the peepul trees, and all the sights and sounds about my old home in India—I can't forget them yet."

Blanche was sympathetic; but she felt

rather than reasoned that the grief for a father's loss, the regrets for friends abruptly quitted and a mode of life abandoned, could not be assuaged merely by a kiss and a kind word. Yet it was evident that Ruth was by no means disposed to play the part of a 'kill-joy in the house beneath whose roof she was now established, or to enact the martyr. Her manner was very soft and gentle, not obtrusively sad or unduly deferential, but that of one who sincerely wishes to please. She had a way of bending her will as it were to that of those with whom she now associated, which was really very pretty and graceful, and harmonised well with the modest drooping of her eyelids when she spoke. There were times (so her ill-wishers said, the latter being some of those vigilant critics who take our wage and wear our livery, or it may



be caps and aprons and cotton prints such as we sanction, but who are not always too lenient censors of our conduct) when her whole face seemed to change its expression by the mere opening of the fine dark eyes, fraught with a singular look, which the same critics averred to be that of ill-temper. But if Miss Willis had not, as Lucy and Blanche Denzil believed her to have, the temper of a lamb, it must be admitted that she was capable of very great self-restraint, since in general conversation she was only too ready to acquiesce with the opinions of others. Jasper had observed the singular brightening of Ruth's eyes sometimes, when she turned them on Sir Sykes, but never towards himself; while his unsuspecting sisters saw no peculiarity in the bearing of the stranger whom they had learned to like.

"I could really believe," said Jasper to himself more than once, "that my father is afraid of that girl—and no wonder after all!" he added, after a moment's reflection. Certainly Sir Sykes did appear somewhat over-anxious that his ward should be happy and comfortable at Carbery, that her tastes should be studied, and her inclinations consulted. Yet he never seemed at ease in her company, and always escaped from her presence as early as politeness permitted; so that his own daughters set down his behaviour as merely prompted by an over-strained sense of hospitality.

There was a fascination in the guest's bearing and conversation, to which even Jasper, with all his predisposition to dislike her, could not but succumb. No great talker, Miss Willis had the power, somehow, of making what she did say more effective

than what fell from other lips than hers. What this art or this gift might be, Jasper Denzil, who was no stranger to women and their ways, could not divine. The girl's voice was rich though low, and admirably modulated, although of music, as she frankly confessed, she knew nothing whatever. And her eyes—the one redeeming feature of a plain pale face—could flash and glitter with wondrously changing play of light ; eyes and voice and words all blending together to convey the expression which their owner desired that they should impart.

There was one person to whom the baronet's ward appeared in the light of an enigma, and this was Lord Harrogate, himself a frequent visitor at the home of the Denzils, between whose family and his own there was indeed some kind of connection. He had given up as preposterous the idea

that he had ever seen Miss Willis before. *That* was of course erroneous, and he must have been the dupe of a fancied resemblance. But he was sufficiently quick-sighted to perceive, what was apparent neither to his sisters nor to Jasper, nor to the Earl or Countess, that a strong, sharply-marked character was concealed behind the gentle, half-bashful demeanour which it pleased Miss Willis to assume.

"I never saw the iron hand," he thought to himself, "so well hidden before by the velvet glove; but it's there for all that. Yonder girl looks capable of turning the whole family round her finger."

Meanwhile Jasper at any rate had other subjects for contemplation than were presented by a psychological study of the orphaned daughter of the late Major Willis, of the Honourable East India Company's

Service. Gentlemen who own and gentlemen who are going to ride horses intended to win a race which had so suddenly swelled into importance as the forthcoming one at Pebworth, have need of frequent communication with one another. Jasper during the next ten days was often in his principal's company, sometimes at Pebworth, now and then at Exeter, when the routine of military duty held the other captain to his post.

In the interim, Captain Denzil could tell by the language of the newspapers which were the accredited organs of the turf, how considerable was the excitement evoked by the selection of Pebworth as a place where might be matched against one another some of the finest weight-carriers chronicled in the Stud Book. The wildest rumours were afloat, and an April sky was not more changeable than were the odds, as reported

from the headquarters of gambling, London and Liverpool. Sometimes the bookmakers were reported to be assured of triumph; sometimes it was hinted that the great betting firms would be severely hit, so unexpected would be the finish of the race.

"Why," indignantly demanded one influential paper, "should Pebworth be dragged into the daylight?" Nor were the other organs of the sporting press slow to swell the chorus of complaint that a cramped and hitherto unheard-of course, situated in an obscure nook of the far west, should be the arena for a struggle such as was anticipated. And then followed dark inuendos and vague suggestions as to the motives of the noble lord who owned The Smasher, and the scarcely less illustrious commoner to whom Brother to Highflyer appertained. During the period preceding the race, the most

contradictory rumours were incessantly published with reference to the rival favourites. They were ill ; they were well ; they had met with all the accidents slight or serious to which the equine genus is liable. One of these important animals had a cough. The other was not quite sound of limb. Both had been overtrained. No. Their training was insufficient, and any nameless outsider could reach the winning-post before them. Once again, both horses were in the very perfection of bloom and beauty, and would compete fairly for the prize.

Strange faces, some of which were not calculated to inspire confidence in those who had silver spoons in the pantry or linen drying on garden-hedge, began to appear at Pebworth and the parts adjacent. Lodgings were in such request that the meanest rooms were eagerly disputed at fancy prices, while

inn and beershop drove a brisker trade than had been known since Pebworth had been disfranchised.

“Sad business, Denzil, this!” exclaimed Jack Prodgers as he dashed into the private parlour of the *De Vere Arms*. “Here’s a private telegram, and here a special edition of a sporting paper. Both agree as to the facts.”

Jasper glanced at the telegram and at the paragraph. Yes. A most unfortunate accident, due to the carelessness of a porter, had occurred to Brother to Highflyer, just as that noble horse was being led from his box to the platform. Mr. Splint, the eminent veterinary surgeon, summoned in hot haste, had examined the off fore-leg, and had expressed a positive opinion; in deference to which Mr. John Knavesmire the trainer and Mr. Wylie the owner had reluctantly decided



to withdraw the name of Brother to High-flyer from the list.

"The race, naturally, must be won by the other favourite, The Smasher," said Captain Prodgers with a grim smile.

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## CHAPTER X.

### WHAT HAPPENED AT PEBWORTH.

FROM early morning the usually sleepy streets of quiet Pebworth had been disturbed by the shouts of brawling hoarse-voiced vendors of so-called 'correct' cards, purporting to furnish accurate information as to the name, weights, and colours of the riders, the nomenclature and ownership of the horses, and other particulars relating to the forthcoming race. Some of these itinerants were in faded red jackets that had felt the dust and the rain on every race-course in Great Britain; others were in tattered fustian, stained by the wet grass of

the moorside, where the foot-sore wretches had been sleeping for a few hours after their weary tramp across country. It might have been opined that gold had been discovered in Dartmoor, and that diggers were hurrying up like so many eagles to the prey, so many were the uncouth groups that flocked in. Some of the pilgrims were the veriest human vermin that cumber the earth. There was the thimble-rigger, whose stock-in-trade consisted of the tiny board or slender table, which his unacknowledged associate is carrying now, with the peas and the thimble in his pocket. There were the proprietors of the roulette boards, and the manipulators of the 'three card trick,' so dangerous to unwary youth. There were gipsy fortune-tellers, dark-eyed, yellow-kerchiefed, and long-haired gipsy men, laden with sticks to be pelted at cocoa-nuts propped

on an ash-wand, or at Aunt Sally with her time-honoured pipe.

All the beggars, street-singers, and sellers of toys or gingerbread in the west of England seemed to have been drawn to Pebworth as steel filings are attracted to a magnet; and with them arrived many a scowling ruffian in baggy slop-suit, or slinking fellow in greasy garments of threadbare black, whose object could hardly have been the wish to witness a contest of strength and speed between two or more gallant horses. Probably the man in black was one of those miserable beings who bet with chance customers, and if they lose, pay in person if not in purse, braving kicks, ducking, and ill-usage, in hopes of five or ten ill-got sovereigns. As for the sturdier brute in nailed boots and velveteen, with the knotted bludgeon beneath his arm, it will go hard

with him if some half-tipsy owner of a watch be not lightened of it before bedtime.

In poured gigs and carts and carriages of every size and kind, some full of honest holiday-makers, others of thoughtful devotees of the Mammon that presides over the great green gaming-table that we know by the name of a race-course. Among the last-mentioned, who in turf phraseology are termed 'bookmakers,' were many, often of gentle birth and nurture, whose feverish life for ten months of the year was one of incessant locomotion, calculation, care, and toil. Some men, sufficiently well educated to see themselves as others see them, yet work harder at the dubious profession they have selected, than does a prosperous doctor or barrister of many briefs — ever on the railroad or in telegraph office, scrambling for make-shift lodgings, suing at the doors

of crowded hotels—chilled by the rain of Newmarket, broiled by the sun of Chantilly—and incessantly on the wing to some new race-meeting, lured on by the *ignis-fatuus* of Hope.

The carriages were drawn up three deep around the judge's chair and the stand. Small as the race-course of Pebworth was, it presented a gay and animated appearance. There were the well-appointed drags of every regiment within reach of the little Devonshire town, while the equipages of the county aristocracy were there in unusual numbers. There were the Fulfords, the Carews, the Trelawneys, and the Tresyllians, the Courtenays, and the Penruddocks, all the rural dignitaries of the district. The Earl of Wolverhampton was there with two of his daughters, accompanied by Blanche Denzil, who was confident of her brother's

success. Lord Harrogate too was there on horseback.

No carriage from Carbery was on the Pebworth course that day. Sir Sykes had heard with displeasure that his son was about to take a part in a steeplechase. Jasper's promise, however, had been given. His name was in print as the rider of Norah Creina, and the baronet saw no help for it. He refused, however, to attend the race with the ladies of his family, and gave but a reluctant consent to his younger daughter's petition to be allowed to accompany Lady Maud and Lady Gladys to the festive scene. The course itself presented a lively and not uncomely scene, the brilliant beauty of the day adding a witchery to the homeliest objects. The dancing sunbeams gilded the tinker's squalid tent and the rags of the beggar-boys who ran, clamorous for half-

pence, after the horsemen cantering by. It was possible to forget the gathering of bookmakers and betting-men, now hoarsely shouting out their offers of a wager, possible to ignore the sordid greed that had prompted the attendance of so many, and to imagine what the scene may have been two hundred years ago, when races were a novelty, a mere trial of merit between swift and strong horses, minus the thousand and one degrading ingredients which now compose the saturnalia.

Jasper, his gay silken jacket concealed by the loose white overcoat which he wore, elbowed his way through the crowd towards the place where, hard by the weighing-stand, the nineteen horses which were the practical residuum of the sixty-seven entries were being led to and fro.

“Have a care there! Do mind his



heels!" exclaimed the reedy voice of an attenuated being in drab gaiters and striped waistcoat, one of the three body-servants in attendance on the magnificent Smasher, as that superb animal began to lash out furiously amongst the mob.

"Grand horse that!" said Captain Producers, as with impartial admiration he surveyed the formidable favourite. "See! what muscles those are that swell beneath a skin as bright and supple as a lady's satin! Does 'My Lord' credit."

"My Lord," a vacuous young gentleman in a suit of black-and-white checks and a soft hat, stood a little way off, sucking the gold head of a short whipstick, and contemplating society in general, through his eyeglass, with a serene stare. Nobody could ever be quite certain whether this aristocratic patron of the turf was unfathomably deep, or absurdly

shallow. His Lordship was a man of few words, and never committed himself in public to an opinion wise or foolish.

That 'My Lord's' stud had a knack of winning was notorious. But then the laurels, such as they were, may have been due to the florid, well-shaven, middle-aged trainer, with a flower in his button-hole, who stood at his Lordship's elbow.

The Smasher was a splendid black horse, over sixteen hands high, and very powerful. His glossy coat shone like a looking-glass; but that his temper was none of the best was evident, not only by the frequent scattering of the crowd, to avoid his iron-shod heels, but by the sidelong glance of his wicked eye and the irritable lashing of his silken tail.

"Shews the whites of them eyes of his, he do, this morning," remarked one appreciative groom.

"Bless ye! the captain won't care," was the phlegmatic reply.

"Rather the captain had the riding of him then nor me," returned the other.

The captain in question was not Jasper Denzil. It was Captain Hanger, pale and unimpassioned as ever, who now pressed up to speak for a moment with the owner and trainer of the horse he was to ride. As he stood, tapping his bright boots with his heavy whip, his gaudy silk jacket peeping from beneath the loose overcoat, he was the object of an inquisitive admiration that might well have been spent upon a worthier object. In certain circles, now, your gentleman steeplechase rider receives an amount of adulation singularly disproportioned to his utility to the commonweal. Of the well-known Captain Hanger, once in the army, then beggared, and now living by the

deliberate risk of neck and bones, it was popularly believed that he would die in the exercise of his profession.

"I don't see the mare," said Jasper, looking around.

"We're keeping her quiet till the last minute," whispered his friend. "No use in letting her chafe here, teased by sun and flies. There, though, is the bell for saddling; and here she comes."

And as Captain Prodgers spoke, a Homeric burst of laughter from the mob, peal upon peal, announced that something had tickled the fancy of the populace. That something was soon seen to be no other than Norah Creina, looking even uglier, as she was led into the inclosure, than she had done in the stable ; a lengthy, clumsy, ungainly creature to look upon, and wearing a bridle of a peculiar and cumbrous construction, fitted

with a muzzle and blinkers, and somewhat similar to that employed in horse-taming by the late Professor Rarey.

"There's a beauty for you!" cried out, in the midst of ironical cheers and merriment, a scoffer in drab gaiters.

"Take care of her, gentlemen—she bites!" bawled another voice, and there was tittering among the spectators in carriages, and unrestrained guffaws amidst the populace.

"Do you mean, seriously, that the mare is to run in that hideous-looking contrivance?" demanded Jasper, sharply and with displeasure in his face, of his ally. "I'm not a mountebank, I suppose, that I should be made publicly ridiculous on the back of such a horse. A man might as well stand in the pillory as"—

"How many hundreds will be in your pocket, Denzil, and thousands in mine, what

with bets and stakes, if Norah Creina comes in first?" interrupted Prodgers earnestly. "Let those laugh that win. They are waiting for us yonder in the weighing-stand."

Of all the candidates for success who, seated in their saddles, took one by one their turn at the scales, the only two who attracted much attention were Jasper Denzil and Captain Hanger; the latter because he was to ride the favourite, the former because he had consented to exhibit himself on so very extraordinary an animal as Norah Creina.

"I've known a dark horse to win a race," remarked one veteran, as he booked a trifling wager on the Irish mare.

"Not with a muzzle, though, George!" replied a contemporary, with twinkling eyes.

The riders were all mounted now, and

taking, some of them, the preliminary canter that is supposed to dissipate stiffness, and then the glistening line of gaily attired horsemen marshalled itself for the start. To the last moment Captain Prodgers, on foot, kept close to Jasper's stirrup. "There's the bell!" cried Norah Creina's owner at last. "Now bend your ear down, dear boy, and mark what I say."

And as Jasper stooped his head to listen, the other captain whispered to him cautiously but with emphasis. "Only if you're hard pressed—but she may win without that," added Prodgers more loudly.

Jasper's suddenly compressed lips, arching brows, and dilated eyes, told that the communication had taken even him by surprise.

"The curb-rein, eh?" he said hoarsely.

"Yes; but only as a last expedient. Leave it slack as long as you can, and use

the snaffle only ; it's as strong as a cable," called out Prodgers ; and Jasper nodded, and cantered up to take his place among the rest.

A waving to and fro of the many-coloured line, the dropping of a flag, a roar from the rabble, and they were off. It was like the effect produced by some gigantic rocket bursting into a galaxy of variously tinted spangles, pink, green, blue, and orange. Then most of these colours seemed to gather themselves together in a group, while Jasper's yellow jacket and black cap, and Captain Hanger's cherry 'colour and white, crept clear of the crowd.

"The Smasher's third !"

"He's second now. Green's in front."

"Ah ! the captain's a deal too wise to be first, so long as Green will make running for him."



"Yes, but look at the ugly long-backed Irish mare! The Smasher can't shake her off, straight as he goes."

The leading horses had got by this time over two-thirds of the course—the first round only—and already the competitors were reduced to seven. Gallant Green was yet in front, riding hard, but his horse was much distressed; and as the second circuit of the course began, The Smasher, skilfully handled by Captain Hanger, shot past him with no apparent effort, and was for the moment first.

"My Lord's usual luck! The race is safe!"

"Cherry and white wins!" shouted hundreds.

But then uprose another roar of "Yellow, Yellow for ever!" as the Irish mare, which had hitherto kept the third place, taking

fence, wall, brook, and rail with lamb-like docility, suddenly quickened her pace, racing neck to neck, head to head, with the redoubtable Smasher.

"A pretty race! A fine sight! A sheet would cover both of them!" was the general cry. The ladies in the carriages and on the stand waved their handkerchiefs enthusiastically, and of the lookers-on there were scores who forgot that their money was at stake, in genuine enjoyment of the struggle. On the rivals went. Together they flew across the brook, together they crashed through the hedges and fences in their way. Then, thanks to his own skill or to the excellence of his horse, Captain Hanger gained ground, and was in front as he prepared to ride at a stiff line of rails, the last serious obstacle, save one, to be encountered in the circuit.

Then it was that Jasper tightened the

curb-rein that he had hitherto left untouched, and the disfiguring blinkers dropped as if by magic from before Nora Creina's eyes! The result was startling. With a snort and a scream, the fierce mare caught sight of her opponent in the act of gathering himself together for the leap; and with a bound such as a tigress might have given, she hurled herself upon him, striving—but owing to the muzzle ineffectually—to tear the other horse with her teeth. There was a crashing of splintered timber, an outcry, a heavy fall, and both horses and both men were down amidst the wreck of the fence.

Jasper, bareheaded and dizzy, was the first to stagger to his feet and regain his saddle. A hundred yards in front was the stone wall with its double ditch, the so-called "sensation jump" of the race, and

which the Committee had taken it upon themselves to heighten for this exceptional contest. Beyond, there was the easy run home over smooth turf to the winning-post.

“Yellow! yellow! Yellow wins!” shouted the crowd, as Jasper approached the wall; but then there was a quick thunder of hurrying hoofs upon the green-sward, and Captain Hanger swept past at whirlwind speed, while cries of “Cherry and white! The Smasher’s first!” rent the air. Till that instant, the Irish mare had been going steadily; but now, on seeing her rival outstrip her rapid pace, her fiendish temper again kindled into flame, and with a shrill scream she darted forward. But Captain Hanger knew his art too well to be surprised for the second time. He had his own horse, sobered by the late fall, well in

hand; whereas he saw that the savage animal which Jasper rode was completely freed from the control of her rider. By a quick and masterly motion of the rein, he wheeled off, eluding the shock that threatened him, and with a rare courage and coolness put The Smasher's head straight for the wall. The gallant horse rose like a bird, topped the obstacle on which his hind-feet clattered, and recovering himself with an effort, galloped in, the winner, amid the deafening applause of thousands.

Jasper was less fortunate. Panting, snorting with rage, in a lather of heat and foam, the furious mare he rode rose at the wall, struck it with her chest, breaking down the new masonry, and rolled over upon the turf beyond, bearing down beneath her weight the unfortunate rider. "A man killed!"

It needed but that cry to make the mob utterly ungovernable ; and, in spite of the efforts of the police, gentle and simple, and those who were neither the one nor the other, hurried pell-mell to the spot where lay, beneath the broken wall, the hapless form of Jasper Denzil. "He's alive!" cried fifty voices, with the oddest mingling of gratification and disappointment. "The rider's living. It's only the mare that's dead," a verdict which turned out to be correct. Then a doctor, one out of the half-dozen of doctors on the course, jumped off the cob he rode, and took possession of Jasper.

"He'll get over it!" cried the surgeon, feeling first the heart and then the wrist of the sufferer. "If we had but a carriage now, to get him quietly to the inn."

Sir Gruntley Pigbury, whose barouche

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stood near, willingly lent it for such a purpose; and in it Jasper Denzil, under the doctor's escort, was duly removed to the shelter of the *De Vere Arms*.

## CHAPTER XI.

### AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

THE *De Vere Arms* at Pebworth, fourth-rate hotel though it necessarily was in a place where any hotel of the first or even of the second magnitude would have been as an oak in a flower-pot, was well and neatly kept. There was the commercial connection, and there was the county connection, both dear to the landlord, but on grounds wholly dissimilar. Biggles had been butler to the present, under-butler and knife-boy to the late Earl of Wolverhampton; and had he but had his own way, the *De Vere Arms* would have been strictly the family hotel



which its address-cards proclaimed it, and the obnoxious word 'commercial' would have found no place there.

Mr. Biggles, however, was in the position of one of those unfortunate managers of English country theatres who tell their friends, perhaps truly, that they would play nothing, save the legitimate drama, if they could help it. They cannot help it, and scared by the dismal spectre of Insolvency, they shelve Shakspeare in favour of newer idols of the public. So did Biggles, and worthy Mrs. B. to boot, lay themselves out in practice to secure the lucrative custom of the ready-money, constantly moving, commercial gentlemen, while in theory devoting all their loyalty to those of their patrons who came in their own carriages, with armorial bearings on their panels and liveried servants on the driving-seat.

To this hostelry was borne, in Sir Gruntley Pigbury's carriage, the insensible form of Jasper Denzil, supported by the sturdy arm of Captain Prodgers, while little Dr. Anlfus, on the opposite seat, kept the patient's nerveless wrist between his own thin fingers all the way from the race-course to the inn. Then Jasper, amidst spasmodic gaspings from the landlady and sympathetic exclamations from the chambermaids, was carried into the *De Vere Arms* and established in one of the best rooms, whence were summarily dislodged the effects of some well-to-do customer who had a horse in the race, but who was unlikely under the circumstances to resent the invasion of his apartment. Jack Prodgers and the doctor seemed to have taken joint possession of the invalid; the former as *prochain ami* (and it is to the credit of such ne'er-do-wells as Captain

Prodgers that the very wildest of them never do leave a friend untended in a scrape), and the other professionally.

Other friends came not. Lord Harrogate did indeed tap at the door, and so did four or five officers of the Lancer regiment, but contented themselves with an assurance that Jasper was in no immediate danger. And when Blanche Denzil's tearful entreaties induced the Earl to solicit admittance to the sick-room for her at least, the surgeon went out and politely deprecated her entrance. Anything which might excite the patient should, he truly said, be as far as possible avoided. It was not exactly possible just yet to ascertain the amount of damage done; but he, the doctor, anticipated no serious consequences. And with this assurance the poor sister was compelled to be content. They say that every educated man of fifty

is a fool or a physician. Jack Prodgers had seen the light some half-century since, and his worst enemies—the men whose cash he pouched at play—would not have taxed him with folly.

“Now, doctor,” he said quietly, “don’t you think the best we can do for the poor fellow is to get his left shoulder into the socket again before the muscles stiffen?”

The surgeon winced. He knew by the cursory examination he had made that no bones—unless it might be the collar-bone, an injury to which is not always promptly ascertained—were broken; but here, annoying circumstance! was a dislocation which he had left to be discovered by an outsider to the profession.

“Bless my soul!” he exclaimed, adjusting his spectacles, “so it is. We have no time to lose.”

As it was, time enough had been lost to bring about a contraction of the muscles, that rendered it necessary to call in the aid of James the waiter and Joe the boots, before the hurt shoulder could be reinstated in its normal position.

The pain of the operation roused Jasper from his stupor. He moaned several times and stirred feebly to and fro, and when the wrench was over, opened his eyes and gazed with a bewildered stare about him. Very pale and ghastly he looked, lying thus, with the blood slowly oozing from a cut on his right temple, and his hair stained and matted. They sprinkled water on his face and put brandy to his lips; but he merely groaned again, and his eyes closed.

"That's a very ugly knock on the temple; I hope there's no more mischief," said the doctor in a whisper, but speaking more

openly than medicine-men, beside a patient's bed, often speak to the laity.

Jack Prodgers shook his head. He was a man of experience, and had in his time seen some prompt and easy recoveries, and other cases in which there was no recovery at all. It was with some remorse that he looked down at the bruised and helpless form lying on the bed. His heart had been case-hardened by the rubs of a worldly career, but there was a soft spot in it after all, and it was with sincere joy that he saw at length the sick man's eyes open with a glance of evident recognition, while a wan smile played about his lips.

"I say, Jack," said Jasper feebly, "we're in a hole, old man, after all"—— Then he fainted.

"Nothing the matter with his reason, thank goodness! It was the shock to the

brain I feared the most for him," said the doctor, as again brandy was administered.

The regular clock-work routine of social machinery must go on in despite of accidents, and accordingly the down-train reached Pebworth at 3.40 (or, to tell the truth, a few minutes behind time) with its usual punctuality. There was no omnibus, whether from the *De Vere Arms* or from the opposition or *White Hart* hotel, in waiting at the station, wherefore the few arrivals had to consign their bales and bags and boxes of samples to the wheelbarrows of porters, for conveyance to whichever house of entertainment they designed to patronise. Amongst these was a thickset, middle-aged man, with trim whiskers, a dust-coloured overcoat, a slim umbrella, and a plump black bag, which he preferred to carry as he trudged from the station to the hotel.

There was nothing very noteworthy about the new-comer, who was neatly dressed in black, and wore a hat that was just old enough to have lost its first tell-tale gloss, except that he had evidently striven to look some years younger than the parish register would have proclaimed him. Thus the purplish tint of his thick whiskers and thinned hair, heedfully brushed and parted so as to make the most of it, savoured of art rather than nature. His cravat too, instead of being black, was what haberdashers call a scarf of blue silk, of a dark shade certainly, but still blue, and was secured by a massive golden horse-shoe. Glittering trinkets rattled at his watch-chain, but his boots were tighter and brighter than the boots of men of business usually are. There is, or ought to be, a sort of fitness between clothes and their wearer, but in the case of this traveller,



obviously bound for the *De Vere Arms*, no such fitness existed. That cold grey eye, those deeply marked crow's-feet, the coarse mouth, and mottled complexion, consorted ill with the pretensions to dandyism indicated by a portion of their owner's attire. Altogether, the man might have been set down as a corn-doctor, a quack, a projector of bubble companies, or possibly an auctioneer whose hammer seldom fell to a purely legitimate bid in a fair market.

As the stranger drew near to the hotel, having inquired his way once or twice from such of the natives as the great attraction of the day had not allured to the race-course, a carriage dashed past him at a very fast pace indeed, and drew up with a jerk in front of the *De Vere Arms*. The gentleman who alighted from it, tall, and of a goodly presence, lingered for an instant in the

doorway to give some order to his servants. As he did so, his eyes encountered those of the traveller freshly arrived by the train, and who by this time was beneath the pillars of the porch. Sir Sykes Denzil, for it was he whose carriage had just brought him in hot haste to the place where his son lay ill, started perceptibly and hesitated, then turned abruptly on his heel and disappeared within the hotel, greeted by the obsequious Mr. and Mrs. Biggles.

Recognition, as we can all avouch, is in the immense majority of cases simultaneous, one memory seeming as it were to take fire at the spark of recollection kindled in the other. In this instance such was not exactly what occurred. Yet the traveller with the bag was perfectly certain that he had seen before the tall gentleman who had

started at the sight of him, and that a diligent searching of the mental archives would elicit the answer to the riddle.

"Have I written or telegraphed to order rooms here?" repeated the new arrival testily, after the flippant waiter who came, flourishing his napkin, to see what the stranger wanted. "No, I have not. And to judge by the size of your town, my friend, and the general look of affairs, I should say that on any other day of the year but this such a precaution would be wholly superfluous."

The waiter, who had been slightly puffed up by the ephemeral vogue of Pebworth and its chief hotel, took the rebuke meekly. "Would you step into the coffee-room, sir?" he said. "I'll ask Mrs. Biggles about accommodation likely to be vacant. Any name I could mention, sir?"

"Name — yes, Wilkins," returned the traveller, pushing open the door of the coffee-room, in which, at various tables, some dozen of sporting-men were making a scrambling meal. One or two of these looking up from their plates, nodded a greeting, with a "How d'ye do, Wilkins?" or "How goes it, old fellow?" salutations which the recipient of them returned in kind. Then the waiter bustled in to say, more respectfully than before, that so soon as No. 28 should be vacated by a gentleman leaving by the 6.25 train, it would be at the disposal of Mr. Wilkins. Further, here was a note for Mr. Wilkins; into whose hand he proceeded to thrust a half-sheet of letter-paper, roughly folded in four, and containing but some two or three lines of blotted handwriting. "If you will so far oblige me" — thus ran the words, shaky

and blurred as to their caligraphy, but tolerably legible—"I shall be glad of a few moments' interview with you, at once if not inconvenient, in No. 11. I will not detain you."

There was no signature, but no reasonable doubt could exist in the mind of Mr. Wilkins as to the note having been penned by the owner of the carriage that had so lately driven up to the door of the *De Vere Arms*.

"Why, this is taking the bull by the horns," said Mr. Wilkins, as he rose to obey the summons.

## CHAPTER XII.

### IN NO. XI.

No. 11 was a sitting-room of a class peculiar to those old-fashioned inns which are rapidly being improved off the length and breadth of Britain, large, low-ceiled, with a sloping floor that attained its highest elevation beside the broad bay-window. A dark room, it must be confessed, and an airless, but snug and warm on winter - nights, when the glow of the firelight combined with the lustre of many wax-candles to defy the storm and blackness without. There had been jovial dinners in that room, and drawing together of arm-chairs around

the huge fireplace, and tapping of dusty magnums of rare old port, and calling for more punch as the night waned, in those hard-living days for which so many of us innocent, pay the penalty in neuralgia and dyspepsia.

In No. 11 stood Sir Sykes, pale but resolute. The traveller with the black bag came in, and for the second time their eyes met. "You wished to see me, sir," began Mr. Wilkins, with a slight bow. "Ah! I remember you now, sir, as it happens," he added in a different tone; "remember you very distinctly indeed, Mr."——

"Hush!" interrupted Sir Sykes, with uplifted fore-finger. "A place like this is the very last in which to mention anything best left unspoken—the very walls, I believe, have ears to hear and

toegues to tattle. I am Sir Sykes Denzil, of Carbery Chase, within a few miles of this, at your service, Mr. Wilkins."

"Sir Sykes Denzil! Well, this *is* a surprise," exclaimed the owner of the name of Wilkins wonderingly, and yet with a sort of dry humour mingling with his evidently genuine astonishment. "Dear me, dear me! They say the world is very little, and people constantly meeting and jostling in it; but I never so thoroughly realised the truth of the saying as I do now. So I've the honour of talking to Sir Sykes Denzil, when I thought I was addressing"——

"Be cautious, sir," interposed the baronet, with an energy that impressed the other in spite of himself. "Let us have no reference, if you please, to a past that is dead and buried. I sent for you, certain as I was



that sooner or later your memory must recall me to your remembrance, and well aware too how easily you could learn who I was here."

"No great trouble about that, Mr.—I mean Sir Sykes," rejoined the traveller smirkingly. "The people seem to know you well enough, and any fellow in the stable-yard would have told me whose was the carriage with the brown liveries."

"And having met and recognised one another," said Sir Sykes, "on what footing is our future intercourse to be conducted? We are not as we once were, lawyer and client, and"—

"No, Sir Sykes, I grant you that; but we might be," returned Mr. Wilkins, rubbing his fleshy hands together, as though they had been two millstones between which the bones of suitors might

be ground to make his bread. "You can't, a man of your landed property—I've heard something as to your acreage, and could give a shrewd guess as to your rent-roll—be without law business. Devonshire isn't Arcadia, I suppose. Are there not leases to draw, inclosure bills to promote, poachers to prosecute, paths to stop up, bills to file, actions to bring, defend, compromise? Ten to one, some of your best farms are let on leases of lives, and—— But no matter! You've your own legal advisers; hey, Sir Sykes?"

The baronet bowed coldly by way of assent.

"Pounce and Pontifex, of Lincoln's Inn—*I know*," pursued the unabashed lawyer. "A brace of respectable twaddling old stagers. There was a saying, soon after I got my articles, as to that firm, to the

effect that Pounce and Pontifex were fit for a marriage settlement, a will, and a Chancery suit, and that was about all. If you care about raising your rents, crushing an enemy, or gratifying a whim—and most rich men have a hankering after one or other of these fancies—why, you'll need a brisker counsellor at your elbow than the jog-trots of Lincoln's Inn."

Again the baronet bent his head, and his eyes moved towards the door. Mr. Wilkins noted their movement.

"You hardly derived a fair judgment of my capabilities," he said, "by the little I had to do in that Sandston business"—

"Again I ask you, sir, to make no mention of that subject. It—it is naturally painful to me—and—and"—Sir Sykes here fairly broke down.

The lawyer's eyes twinkled as he saw his advantage. "So long as *you* remember it, Sir Sykes," he made haste to say, "I shall be only too happy to forget the whole concern. What was that story about the organ-blower and Handel? 'Shan't it be "we," then?' said the fellow, when the great organist couldn't get a note out of his instrument for want of the necessary but humble bellows. And the musician was compelled to acknowledge that there was a sort of partnership between the man who fingered the stops and the man who raised the wind. I'm in no hurry. Think it over. I have a client to see here to-day; but perhaps you will let me have a word with you before you drive back to Carbery Chase."

A long deep line, which might have been mistaken for the furrow of some old sword-

cut, running from the angle of the mouth obliquely upwards, became visible in the baronet's comely face as he listened. He was one of those men who can better endure misfortune than disrespect, and to whom the bitterest sting of ruin is the withdrawal of the deference and lip-service which environ them. But it was in an amicable tone that he made answer: "I shall be happy to pursue our conversation, Mr. Wilkins, to-day or at any time which you may deem suitable. At present, however, you will excuse me if I leave you. My son, Captain Denzil, has been hurt—badly hurt, I fear, in the steeplechase to-day, and I have been called here to see him, where he lies, in this very hotel." And the baronet moved towards the door.

"Hurt, is he?" exclaimed Mr. Wilkins,

with inconsiderate roughness. "Ah, then, I shall look to you, Sir Sykes, to indemnify me, in case"——

Then came an awkward pause. The solicitor was a remarkably plain-spoken man, but he did not quite like to say, "in case your son's accident prove fatal," and so stopped, and left his eloquent silence to complete his words. Sir Sykes, with his hand on the door, turned, astonished, upon the attorney.

"What, pray, have you to do with the illness or the recovery of Captain Denzil?" he asked in evident ill-humour. He had borne up to this with Mr. Wilkins, but the lawyer's interference with regard to his son appeared] to him in the light of a gratuitous piece of insolence.

"Simply," returned Mr. Wilkins, thrusting his hand into an inner pocket of his

coat, "because I am the holder of certain acceptances, renewed, renewed afresh, and finally dishonoured; acceptances amounting, with expenses, to a gross amount of—shall we say some eleven or twelve thousand, Sir Sykes? Nearer the twelve than the eleven, I suspect. A flea-bite of course to a gentleman of your fortune, but a very important sum to a plain man like yours truly."

"I have been put to heavy expense, very heavy, for my son's debts," said Sir Sykes, almost piteously. "I have paid every"—

"Now, my very good sir," interrupted the attorney, "don't, I beg you, don't fall into the common error of fathers, and imagine that your own particular son is either a miracle of ingenuous candour or a prodigal worse than his neighbours. You think that you've paid all his liabilities,

Sir Sykes, and no doubt you have paid all you knew of. But as a man of the world, if not as a parent, you ought to be aware that nobody ever did tell all that he owed—excess of modesty, perhaps! They always leave a margin, these interesting penitents; and in this case, as you will see by these documents” (and Mr. Wilkins produced several pieces of stamped paper), “the margin is tolerably ample.”

The baronet was now thoroughly roused to wrath. He strode to and fro with frowning brow and hands that were fast clenched together, then walked to the window and stood still, idly tapping the panes with one white finger, on which there glistened a great diamond that had been an heirloom at Carbery Chase before ever a Denzil crossed its threshold.

“I’ll not give him a shilling or leave him



a shilling!" he said in a voice that quivered with anger. "Carbery Chase is my very own, and I can deal with it as I please. My daughters at any rate have deserved better of me than that thankless, graceless boy."

Sir Sykes, under the influence of this new emotion, seemed to have forgotten the lawyer's presence, or merely to regard Mr. Wilkins in the light of the impartial Chorus in a Greek tragedy; but the attorney, who was by no means pleased by the turn which the affair seemed to be taking, intervened.

"Come, come, Sir Sykes. It's natural that you should be annoyed at having such a heavy bill presented, when you thought it settled. But between ourselves, boys will be boys. The captain has turned over a new leaf, and rely on it he will be a credit

to you yet. I've a pretty wide acquaintance amongst wild young gentlemen of his kind, and I give you my word I don't know one who is more wide-awake. He had paid his 'prentice fees, and that smartly; but I expect before I die to hear of him as an ornament to the bench of magistrates and perhaps a county member. As for these bills and notes of hand"——

"I am not liable for a sixpence!" exclaimed Sir Sykes petulantly. "My son may go through the Court if he chooses, and perhaps will learn a wholesome lesson from the exposure, which"——

"Fie, fie, Sir Sykes!" broke in the lawyer. "A coat of whitewash, believe me, sticks to a youngster's back to that extent that no amount of scrubbing can get rid of it. Fume and fret as you please, you know, and I know, that you mean Captain Jasper to

have Carbery after you, and to keep the place in the Denzil line. Better so, than to have so fine an estate sold or cut in two for division between your daughters' husbands. And the captain won't bear the 'bloody hand' in his escutcheon the better because he has been made an insolvent in his youth. As for these claims, I don't press for an immediate settlement; not I; I don't exact my pound of flesh down on the nail, Sir Sykes."

There was a hard struggle in the baronet's breast. Time had been given him for reflection, and he had used it. To hear of his son's extravagance, of his son's deceit, and from such lips, was bad enough. To be compelled to endure the familiarity of the lawyer's manner was to have to swallow a still more bitter pill. He could remember Mr. Wilkins of old, blunt and jocose

certainly, but by no means so jaunty in his bearing as he now was, although Sir Sykes had not then been the rich county magnate he had blossomed. He felt, and writhed as he felt, that it was the attorney's sense of his hold upon him by reason of his knowledge of his past life, which had emboldened Mr. Wilkins to deal with him as he had done. But the most provoking feature of the affair was that Sir Sykes felt that this man's advice, coarsely and offensively administered as it was, yet contained a solid kernel of truth. Jasper was by no means a model son. He had committed fearful follies, and incurred debts which even the Master of Carbery had thought twice before discharging. His profligacy was redeemed by no brilliant talents, softened by no affectionate qualities. There are spendthrifts who remain lovable to the last, as there are others who dazzle

the world by the glitter of their wit or valour. To neither category did the graceless off-spring of Sir Sykes belong. And yet, in spite of his occasional menaces on the subject of his will, the baronet felt that national manners and family pride combined to constitute a sort of moral entail, of which Jasper was to reap the benefit.

"I must see my son," said Sir Sykes smoothly, after a pause; "and when I have time to think over the matter, Mr. Wilkins, I will write to you appointing as early an interview as possible. In the mean time I feel assured that you will see the propriety of not urging personally your claims on Captain Denzil in his present condition."

Mr. Wilkins was amenity itself. He would but eat a morsel in the coffee-room, he said, and would then go back to London by the next train, confident that he could

not leave his interests in better hands than those of Sir Sykes.

“The old address, sir ! You used to know it well enough !” said the lawyer with a leer, as he took the hand which the baronet did not dare to refuse, in sign of friendship ; and so they parted.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### FATHER AND SON.

SIR SYKES was a weak man, and there are few readier elements of mischief than that of a weak man in a strong place—meaning thereby a position where there is authority to be abused. Some of the world's worst tyrants have been emphatically weak, mere spiteful capricious children grown to man's estate, and indued respectively with all the powers of the purple, the royal jika, and the triple tiara. But then the mighty system which they, unworthy, swayed, resembled some gigantic engine put into motion by the idle touch of a truant urchin's hand, and

crushing all resistance by the resistless force of its swaying levers and grinding wheels.

A Devonshire baronet, in common with baronets elsewhere, does expect to be to a certain extent the petty autocrat of his own fields and hamlets, to find that there are those who court the great man's smile and tremble at his frown, and to hold rule within strictly constitutional limits over the dwellers on his land and the inmates of his house. The melancholy which had become a part of Sir Sykes Denzil's inner nature, and the indolence which had gradually incrustated him, had prevented the lord of Carbery from asserting in practice the prerogatives which he knew to belong to him in theory. Thus he did not really administer patriarchal justice on his estate, as some hale landlords do. His bailiff decided which labourers should be employed, which dismissed, and



what wages should be allotted to crow-boys and weeding-girls. The steward arranged as to the barns to be rebuilt, the repairs to be granted or refused, the rent of whose cottage was to be forgiven, or which arrears were to be sternly exacted. Poachers whom the head-keeper did not like, found Sir Sykes's vicarious wrath make the parish too hot to hold them, while luckier depredators wired hares unpunished.

The part of a *roi fainéant* suited better with Sir Sykes Denzil's languid habits than they did with his tolerably active mind. He was well aware that the lethargy of King Log is always supplemented by the not wholly disinterested activity of King Log's zealous ministers, and had formed frequent resolutions as to taking into his own hands the reins of government, and becoming in fact as well as in name the lord of the manor

—of six manors indeed, of which Carbery was the chief. These resolutions had never been acted upon ; but Sir Sykes had always been able to lay to his soul the flattering unction that it rested with him alone to choose the time for realising them.

The events of the last few weeks had given some rude shocks to the baronet's indolent self-complacency. He had been threatened with consequences of which he, and he alone, could thoroughly comprehend the direful nature, and he had been forced to a series of compliances, each of which had degraded him in his own eyes. He had borne with the cynic effrontery of the sailor Hold. He had beneath his roof, seated at his table, in constant association with him and his, an unbidden guest. Mr. Wilkins he had, through an unlucky chance, encountered, and instantly the fetters of a new

vassalage appeared to be fastened on his reluctant limbs. And he owed this fresh humiliation to the misconduct of his own son !

Sir Sykes was very angry as he quitted No. 11 to seek out the chamber in which Jasper lay, so angry that his temper overmastered for the moment both the pleadings of natural affection and the instinct of caution. He laid his hand brusquely on the door of the room which had been pointed out to him as that to which Jasper had been conveyed, and was about to enter, with small regard to the nerves of the invalid within, when he felt a grasp upon his sleeve, and turned to be confronted by the wiry figure, anxious face, and bead-like black eyes of little Dr. Aulfus.

“ Excuse me. Sir Sykes Denzil, unless I am very much mistaken ?” said the doctor,

taking off his hat with such an air, that Sir Sykes, irritable as he was, felt compelled to acknowledge the bow. "Allow me to introduce myself: Dr. Aulfus, Benjamin Aulfus, Ph.D., M.D., M.R.C.S. of Heidelberg, Edinburgh, and London respectively. We never chanced, before to-day, Sir Sykes, to come personally into contact, and I regret that the occasion of our first interview should be so sad a one."

During this speech, the doctor's eyes had taken stock as it were of Sir Sykes's aspect, and had read the signs of anger in his knitted brows and quivering mouth as accurately as a mountain shepherd discerns the portents of the coming storm. Nor was the reason far to seek. Gossip had been busy, of course, with the private affairs of so exalted a family as that which dwelt at Carbery Chase; and Sir Sykes would have

been astonished to hear at how many minor tea-tables the surgeon—for, his medical diplomas notwithstanding, Dr. Aulfus was consulted nineteen times out of twenty as a general practitioner—had listened while Captain Denzil's debts and his father's displeasure were freely canvassed.

Of the arrival of Mr. Wilkins and of the acceptances which the lawyer held, the little man of healing could of course know nothing. But he shrewdly surmised that Jasper had staked all that he could scrape together, and probably more, on the event of the desperate race which he had ridden on that day, and that his pecuniary losses had provoked the indignation of Sir Sykes, already smarting under recent sacrifices.

“You are very good, sir; I shall see my son, and then”——

Sir Sykes had got thus far in his speech,

attempting the while to brush past the doctor, when he found himself gently but resolutely repulsed.

“Now, Sir Sykes,” said the little man, interposing his diminutive person between the tall baronet and the door, as some faithful dog might have done, “pray have patience with me. Captain Denzil is my patient. He has sustained severe injury, the precise extent of which it is impossible yet for science to determine, and I am responsible for his safety, humanly speaking—the pilot, in fact, with whom it rests to bring him into port. We have just succeeded, by the help of an opiate, in inducing sleep. It will not last long, on account of the smallness of the dose. But it is of the utmost consequence that it should not be broken ; and in fact, Sir Sykes, my patient is my patient, and I must protect him even against his own father.”

These last words were uttered in consequence of a renewed attempt on the baronet's part to force a passage, and the persuasive tone in which they were spoken contrasted oddly with the firmness of the doctor's attitude.

"Really, Mr. Aulfus," said Sir Sykes, half apologetically, half in dudgeon ; but the other cut him short with : "Excuse me, Sir Sykes. *Dr.* Aulfus, if you please. It is perhaps the weakness of a professional purist, but I do like to be dubbed a doctor ; as your noble neighbour and connection, the Earl, no doubt has a preference for the title of 'My Lord.' It has cost me dear enough, sir, that handle to my name ; kept me, I may safely say, out of a good four hundred a year of practice I might have had, since old women and heads of families are shy of sending for a regular physician ;

and that's why such fellows as Lancetter at High Tor, and Druggett the apothecary in Pebworth High Street, rattle about the county, feeling pulses and sending out physic, when a man who has more learning in his little finger than—— You smile, sir; and indeed I was unduly warm. No selfish love of lucre, believe me, prompted my remarks, but a sincere scorn for the prejudices and gullibility, if the word be not too strong, of our Devonshire Bœotians."

By this time the doctor had succeeded in getting Sir Sykes into a neighbouring room, the door of which stood invitingly open, and thus securing the sleeper against the chance of being rudely awakened from his slumber. The baronet too had employed a minute or two in reflections which shewed him how unseemly was the part which he had been



about to play, while some dim consciousness that it was unfair to visit on Jasper the unwelcome recognition and jocular impertinence of Mr. Wilkins, began to creep into his perturbed mind.

"You forget, Dr. Aulfus," he said mildly enough, "that I have as yet heard no details as to the injuries which my son has sustained. They are not, I apprehend, of a very serious or indeed dangerous character?"

"Umph! Dislocation of right shoulder, now reduced, but attended with much pain; severe contusion on temple; some bad bruises, and complete prostration of nervous system from the stunning blow and violent concussion of spinal cord," dryly rejoined the doctor, summing up the facts as though he had been a judge putting the pith of some case before a jury. "These are all the results that I know

of" —— And he paused, hesitating, so that Sir Sykes for the first time felt a genuine twinge of alarm.

"Have you any suspicion, doctor, that there is something worse than this?" he asked, drawing his breath more quickly.

"I don't know. I hope not," returned Dr. Aulfus thoughtfully. "Our knowledge after all is but cramped and bounded. I remember once at sea (I was assistant-surgeon in the navy and also on board Green's Indiamen, before I graduated in medicine) seeing a look in the face of a young sailor who had fallen from the mizzen shrouds to the deck, very like what I saw, or fancied I saw, in Captain Denzil's face to-day. But that was a fall, compared with which even the accidents of a steeplechase are trifles," added the doctor more cheerfully, and with an evident wish to change the subject.

"It is a mad sport, taken as a form of excitement," said Sir Sykes, his resentment beginning to turn itself towards the institution of steeple-chasing; "worse still, when mere greed actuates the performers, brutal curiosity the spectators."

"I quite agree with you, Sir Sykes, quite," chimed in the doctor, with a bird-like chirrup of acquiescence. "The mob, my dear sir, whether in decent coats or in torn fustian, is animated by much the same spirit which caused the Roman amphitheatre to ring with applause as wild beasts and gladiators, pitted against one another in the arena, stained the sand with"—

Here Captain Prodgers came in on tiptoe to say that Jasper was awake and sensible; that he had twice asked if his father had not yet arrived; and that he, Prodgers, had volunteered to make inquiries, and hearing

the sound of voices as he passed the half-closed door, had entered. "You, Sir Sykes, I have had the pleasure of meeting once before—at Lord Bivalve's, in Grosvenor Place," he said with a bow. "Captain Prodgers of the Lancers," he added, by way of an introduction. The baronet returned the bow stiffly. He had some recollection of Captain Jack's jolly face beaming across the Bivalve mahogany; but he felt anything but well disposed towards the owner of Norah Creina and the man who had led his son into the present scrape.

"A friend of my son's, I am aware," said Sir Sykes half bitterly.

"And I am afraid, 'Save me from my friends,' is the saying just now uppermost in your mind, Sir Sykes," returned Captain Prodgers. "But I do assure you that, hard hit in the pocket as I have been in this

precious business, I'd sooner have lost the double of my bets, than have seen that poor fellow knocked about as he has been. I'm no chicken, and sentiment don't come natural to me, but I give you my word that had the tumble turned out as bad as I feared it would when first I saw it, I should—never have forgiven myself, that's all." Having said which, Jack Prodggers mentioned to the doctor that he should be found when required in the coffee-room, and with another bow to Sir Sykes, withdrew. The baronet, guided by Dr. Aulfus, entered the darkened room where Jasper lay.

"Is that you, sir? I thought you would come," said the hurt man from the bed, stretching out his feeble hand, and as Sir Sykes took the thin fingers within his own grasp, his anger smouldering yet seemed for the moment to die away, chased by the

crowd of early recollections that beset his memory. He could remember Jasper as a lisping child, a quick intelligent boy, unduly indulged and pampered it is true, but bold-faced and free-spoken at an age, when many a youngster, far nobler in every quality of heart and head, is sheepish and tongue-tied. In those days father and mother had been proud and fond of the boy, and Jasper's future prosperity had been no unimportant element in Sir Sykes's schemes and day-dreams.

"You do not feel much pain now?" asked the baronet gently.

"In my arm and head I do," said the patient, stirring uneasily.

The doctor, as he adjusted the pillows, smiled hopefully. "A very good sign that," he whispered to Sir Sykes; "better than I had hoped for, after the draught. I think

we may pronounce all immediate cause for anxiety to be over."

"When can he be moved?" asked Sir Sykes, in the same cautious tone.

"To Carbery? I should say, if he goes on as well as he is doing now, to-morrow," replied Dr. Aulfus. "I will write down some instructions, with which it will be well to comply, for it will be some few days at least before he can resume his former habits of life."

"What are you two conspiring about?" demanded Jasper, with an invalid's customary peevishness, from the bed. And then Sir Sykes had to resume his seat and to say a few soothing words.

"You'll soon be well, my boy," he said kindly; "and soon back with us at Carbery, under your sisters' good nursing. Dr. Aulfus here will, I hope, contrive to come over and

give us a call every day till you get your strength again."

Dr. Aulfus said that he should be delighted to attend his patient at Carbery Chase, and indeed he looked radiant as he said it. A physician is, after all, a man, and probably a parent, and little Dr. Aulfus had a wife and was the happy donor of six hostages to fortune. He valued the privilege of professional admittance at Carbery, very highly, less on account of the emoluments directly derived therefrom, than of the many small people who would augur well of his skill, since beneath a baronet's roof he should prescribe for a baronet's heir.

The brief conversation between Sir Sykes and his son was rendered the less marked because of Jasper's habitual reticence, and of his father's unwillingness to touch on any topic that might prove painful. Thus the



lawyer and his bills met with no mention, and the steeplechase would also have been passed over, had not Jasper himself said : " I told Jack Prodgers I shouldn't go in for cross-country work again, except with the hounds in winter. No fear, sir, of my donning the silk jacket any more, after this sharp lesson of aching bones and empty pockets. Don't be angry, please, though, with poor old Jack. He meant all for the best, he did."

Sir Sykes replied that he had already had the pleasure of shaking hands with Captain Prodgers, whom he had formerly met, it appeared, in London society. And soon afterwards, in compliance with an almost imperceptible motion of the doctor's head, he withdrew ; and Captain Jack was recalled to keep watch, uncomplainingly, beside his friend's couch, while the patient dozed or talked in snatches.

"Smoke away, old man ; it rather does me good than not," Jasper had said, and the captain's cigar was seldom extinguished during his vigil.

"He'll do !" was the little doctor's cheery whisper as he paid his early morning visit to his charge. And soon after noon, Jasper, pale and tottering, and with his bruised arm in a sling, was helped into one of the Carbery carriages and propped with cushions ; and under the tender escort of his two sisters, Lucy and Blanche Denzil, was slowly and heedfully conveyed home to Carbery Chase.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SHARING OF THE SPOIL.

THE name of Mr. Enoch Wilkins, Solicitor in the High Court of Chancery, and Attorney-at-law, before, according to the polite legal fiction, the Queen herself at Westminster, was deeply inscribed, in fat black engraved characters, on a gleaming brass plate which formed the chief adornment of the dark-green door of his City office. If this brass plate really did gleam, as it did, like a piece of burnished gold, its refulgence was due to unremitting exertions on the part of the office lad, whose objurgations were frequent as at unholy matutinal hours he plied the

obdurate metal with rotstone, oiled flannels, and chamois leather. For the atmosphere of St. Nicholas Poultney (so named from the hideous effigy of a begrimed saint, mottled by frost and blackened by soot, which yet decorated the low-browed doorway of a damp little church hard by) was not conducive to brilliancy, whether of glass, brass, or paint, being heavily charged, on the average of days, with tainted air, foul moisture, and subdivided carbon, with rust, dust, and mildew. Nevertheless Mr. Wilkins, who was a master to be obeyed, contrived that his plate-glass windows should flash back whatever rays of light the pitying sun might deign to direct on so dismal a region, girt in and stifled by a wilderness of courts, lanes, streets, and yards, and also that door-handles and bell-pulls should be shining and spotless as a sovereign new-minted, the door-

step a slab of unsullied stone, and passage, staircase, and offices as trim and clean as the floors of some lavender-scented farmhouse among the cabbage roses of Cheshire. These praiseworthy results were not attained without labour, sustained and oft renewed, on the part of Mrs. Flanagan, the so-called laundress, whose washing was effected by the vigorous application of scrubbing-brush and Bath-brick ; of a melancholy window-cleaner from Eastcheap, whose bread was earned by perpetual acrobatic feats on narrow sills and outside ledges ; and of the office lad already mentioned, whose main duties, though he called himself a clerk, were those of keeping the externals of his master's place of business at the utmost pitch of polish.

In very truth, although there was a messenger, fleet of foot and cunning in threading his way through the labyrinthine

intricacies of the City, always perched on a leather-covered stool in the antechamber, to supplement the services of the office lad, Mr. Wilkins had no clerk. A great deal of his business was transacted by word of mouth; he answered his own letters; and when much of the scribe's work became requisite, some civic law stationer would send in one or two red-eyed men in mouldy black, with finger-nails indelibly stained by the ink that had become their owners' element, and a sufficient quantity of draught folio paper would be covered with legal copperplate.

The outer office was neatness itself, from the bright fire-irons in the fender to the maps on the wall and the rulers and pewter inkstands on the desks. And the inner room, where the lawyer himself gave audience, was almost cheerful, with its well-brushed Turkey carpet, sound furniture,

well-stored book-shelves, and general aspect of snug comfort. There were those who wondered that Mr. Wilkins, whose reputation did not rank very high in the learned confraternity to which he belonged, should so pointedly have deviated from the tradition which almost prescribes dirt and squalor and darkness for the surroundings of those who live by the law. There were, not very far off, most respectable firms, the name of whose titled employers was Legion, yet through whose cobwebbed panes was filtered the feeble light by which their bewildered clients stumbled among ragged carpets and rickety furniture to reach the well-known bee-hive chair. But Mr. Wilkins was a man capable of attending to his own interests, and probably he had found out what best chimed with the prejudices of those for whose custom he angled.

There was nothing in the room itself to shew that it was a lawyer's office. It might have been that of a surveyor or a promoter of companies, for there was nothing on the walls but a set of good maps and four or five excellent engravings. Not a deed-box, not a safe, was to be seen, and if there were law-books on the shelves they held their place unobtrusively amongst other well-bound volumes. Mr. Wilkins sitting in his usual place, with one elbow resting on the table before him, seemed to be indulging in a reverie of no distasteful character, to judge by the smile that rested on his coarse mouth as he softly tapped his front teeth with the mother-of-pearl handle of a penknife, as though beating time to his thoughts. At last, warned by the striking of the office-clock, the hour-hand of which pointed to eleven, Mr. Wilkins shook off his pre-occupa-



tion of mind, and rang the hand-bell at his elbow.

The office lad, who called himself a clerk, was prompt in answering the tinkling summons of his employer.

"Any one been here yet?" demanded the lawyer.

"Touchwood and Bowser's articulated clerk with notice of new trial in case of Green (in holy orders) *v.* Gripson — the bill-stealing case, you know, sir, that the country parson chose to go to a jury about."

"Ah, yes," rejoined Mr. Wilkins, again tapping his front teeth with the pearl-handled knife, while a look of intense amusement overspread his face. "Wants another shot at the enemy, does he, the Rev. James Green! It was grand to see him in the witness-box, indignantly insisting on the fact that not one sixpence ever reached him

in return for his promissory-note despatched per post, on the faith of Mr. Gripson's advertisement and fair words. Then some Mr. Jenks, a total stranger, happens to give valuable consideration, at third or fourth hand, for the stamped paper with the clergyman's signature, and, Rev. Green objecting to cash up, gets a *fi. fa.*—a neat contraction of *feri facias*, which, as we lawyers know, is a term which directs an execution to be levied on the goods of a debtor, ha, ha!—has it backed in Wiltshire, and sells up every bed and chest of drawers in the vicarage. Mr. Green brings an action against Gripson, who is comfortably out of the way, but retains me. We traverse everything, demur to everything, put in counter pleas and rebutters, change the venue, and play Old Gooseberry with the too confiding Green, whose counsel elects to be nonsuited.

Now, like a Briton, he is ready for us again."

Mr. Wilkins laughed, and the juvenile clerk re-echoed the laugh. Sharp practice, such as that so lovingly narrated by the attorney, apparently for lack of a better audience, was congenial to the mind of this keen-witted young acolyte of Themis, with whom the proverbial distinction between Law and Equity seemed to be very clearly defined.

"Nobody else called?" asked Mr. Wilkins.

"Yes. Stout sporting-looking gent, who said he'd make shift, when I told him you had stepped out to the Master's chambers, to come again to-morrow. Name of Prior," returned the youth.

"Ah, Nat the bookmaker, wanting to know how near the wind he may sail without getting into the sweep-net of a

criminal indictment," said the lawyer placidly.

"Nothing else, hey?"

"Only Mr. Isaacs of Bowline Court, Thames Street, sent round to say he would look in between eleven and twelve," was the reply.

"I'll see him and any gentleman he may bring with him," rejoined Mr. Wilkins, taking up the newspaper, as the office lad retired; but in five minutes returned, ushering in three gentlemen, whose hooked noses, full red lips, jet-black hair, and sloe-black eyes gave them a strong family resemblance. They were old acquaintances doubtless, for the greeting which they received from Mr. Wilkins was a familiar one.

"How do, Moss? How goes it, Braham, my buck? You're all right, Isaacs, I can see for myself."

Nothing could well be more unlike what,

during the regency of the late King George IV., was called a buck, than was Mr. Braham, who was simply a corpulent Jew, ineffably greasy in appearance, and who wore a faded olive-green greatcoat that might have passed for a medieval gabardine, and carried an empty blue bag over his left arm. Mr. Moss, his junior by some years, was better dressed, but his raven locks fell upon a shirt collar of dubious whiteness, and his dingy finger-nails were in unpleasant contrast with the splendour of the heavy rings he wore, and of the huge emerald in his satin necktie. The youngest of the three, Mr. Isaacs, a hawk-eyed little man, bejewelled and florid of attire, was by far in dress and person the least unclean of the three.

There was a little conversation as to weather and other general topics, and then Braham the senior of the three Hebrews

pulled out a watch as round and almost as big as a golden turnip, and compared it with the office clock. "Letsh get along," he said genially: "bushiness, bushiness, my dears, waitsh for no man."

"You're right, Uncle Jacob," chimed in Mr. Moss, who could scarcely have been, otherwise than figuratively and in oriental fashion, the nephew of his stout kinsman, but who was certainly a Jew of a much more modern pattern. He, at any rate, coquetted with soap and water, and had discarded the shibboleth in his speech; but it might be doubted whether the elder Israelite, for all his repellent exterior, was not the better fellow of the two.

"Business by all means," cheerily responded Mr. Wilkins. "We've done it together before to-day, and we'll do it again, I hope, gentlemen, for many a day yet to

come. It is a very pleasant occasion on which we now assemble—nothing less, if I may say so, than the dividing of the profits, the sharing of the spoil.”

There was a hearty laugh.

“Sharing of the shpoil!” chuckled elderly but still vigorous Mr. Braham. “What a boy he ish, thish Wilkinsh, what a boy he ish!”

“And now for it,” said Mr. Wilkins, rustling over a bundle of papers that lay before him. “Here we have it in black and white, worth all the patter and palaver in the world. These are the baronet’s first and second letters, the second inclosing an uncommonly stiff cheque. Here are Captain Denzil’s bills—pretty bits of kites they are, renewed here and renewed there—and here are our old agreements, notes, and memoranda, duplicates of which I’ve no doubt are in

all your pockets. Pass them round, Isaacs, and take a good look at them first. You're an attorney, you know, and that's why you're here, though I don't believe, my friend, that you 'pull off' a clear five hundred out of the haul."

"Yesh, yesh, he'sh an attorney, ash Wilkinsh saysh," said Mr. Braham, whose laughter was very ready, as that of fat people often is; "and sho we have him here. Shet a thief to catch a"——

Here a warning kick or other practical exhortation to caution on the part of his kinsman appeared to cut short the overfluency of the bulky Hebrew, and he became as mute as a mouse, while Mr. Isaacs read aloud in a high shrill voice the contents of Sir Sykes Denzil's letters and also a brief summary which Mr. Wilkins had prepared.

There was some discussion, but there



really was not room for much. Here was no compromise, no handing over of so many shillings in the pound. Sir Sykes Denzil had paid his son's liabilities without the abatement of a guinea. Mr. Braham was to receive what he called "shix thoushand odd;" Mr. Moss, two thousand eight hundred and seventy-two; four hundred and thirty were for Mr. Isaacs; and the residue was for Enoch Wilkins, Esquire, gentleman.

It was a strange sight when the rolls of bank-notes were produced, to see the actual partition of the Bank of England's promises to pay, the vulture beaks bending over the crisp paper, the wary inspection of water-mark and number and signature, and the stuffing of pocket-books and cramming of purses and stowing away of what seemed to be regarded rather as plunder than as lawful gains. Two odd things during this

transaction were to be noticed—first, that Mr. Braham, who was incomparably the shabbiest Jew present, met with deference on every hand save from irreverent Wilkins; and secondly, that all the Jews seemed to take up their money grudgingly, like hounds that have chopped their fox in covert.

“Well done, Shir Shykesh!” exclaimed the heavy Hebrew with the green gabardine and the blue bag. “If they wash all of hish short, there might be the moneysh, but there wouldn’t be the fun!”

“We’ll drink Sir Sykes’ health, at any rate,” briskly put in Mr. Wilkins.—“Sims!” and he tinkled the office hand-bell as he spoke, “glasses and cork-screw.”

It was good amber-hued sherry, none of your modern abominations, but a real Spanish vintage, long mellowed in its dusty bin, that gurgled into the glasses under

the careful handling of Mr. Wilkins. The Hebrews sipped, appraised—where could be found judges so critical!—and drank.

“I’m shorry for the poor young man,” said Mr. Braham, in a sort of outburst of sentiment, at mention of Captain Denzil’s name.

“So that he gets his victuals,” remarked the Jew attorney curtly, “I don’t see why he’s to be pitied.”

“It *is* a shelling out!” was the mild rejoinder of the stout Israelite with the blue bag, who seemed to be by far the softest-hearted of the company. “Of courshe, when I thought he would do me, I didn’t care; but now I remember he didn’t get much, not above sheven-fifty cash. All the resht wash pictures, wine—not like yoursh, Wilkinsh—cigars, and opera-tickets.”

“He went through the mill, I suppose,”

said Mr. Moss, "as others have done before him, and 'others will do after him ; eh, Uncle Jacob ?"

"Eh, eh, grisht to the mill !" chuckled the stout proprietor of the empty blue bag ; and the quartette of confederates soon separated.

Mr. Wilkins, left alone, purred contentedly as he poured out and tossed off another glass of the sherry so deservedly lauded, and then, rising from his chair, took down a Baronetage, bound in pink and gold, and fluttered over the leaves until his finger rested on the words : "Denzil, Sir Sykes ; of Carbery Chase, county Devon ; of Threepham Lodge, Yorkshire ; Ermine Moat, Durham ; and Malpas Wold, Cheshire, succeeded *his* father, Sir Harbottle Denzil, August 18— ; married, May 18— ; formerly in the army, and attained the rank of Major. Is a magis-

trate and deputy-lieutenant for Devonshire. Unsuccessfully contested the county at the election of 18—.”

“To think,” said the attorney, stroking the book with his fleshy hand, “how much one can read between the lines of these plausible announcements, almost as blandly eulogistic as the inscriptions which chronicle on their tombstones fond wives, faultless husbands, and parents worthy to be immortalised by Plutarch ! How trippingly the name of that needy old reprobate Sir Harbottle rolls off the tongue. He to be described as of Threepham and Malpas ! Say, rather, of any foreign lodging or foreign jail, of the Isle of Man while it was yet a sanctuary for the debtor, of the Rules of the King’s Bench. But Carbery is very genuine, anyhow.”

Mr. Wilkins paused for a moment, and then mused : “I could spoil your little game,

Sir Sykes—spoil it in a moment, and compel you to exchange your D. L.'s uniform of scarlet and gold for—never mind what! So long as the goose lays the golden eggs, it would not be the part of a wise man to twist her neck.” Having said which, Mr. Wilkins brushed his coat, drew on his gloves, and taking up his hat, sallied out. “Taxing Office; back in an hour,” he said to the office lad as he went out. “If I am detained, you need not wait for me after two o'clock.”

“Ten to four, he don't shew up,” said the youth, who was accustomed to the professional figments which served to beguile credulous clients, but who congratulated himself at the prospect of a speedy release from duty. “If the governor doesn't put in an appearance by 1.30, I'll make myself scarce, or my name is not Sims!”

Meanwhile, Mr. Wilkins made his way through the jostling crowd that roared and seethed among the busy streets of the City, until he reached an office, resplendent with plate-glass and French-polished mahogany, in Cornhill, on the door of which was inscribed, 'Bales and Beales, Stock and Share Brokers.'

There were a good many customers in the outer office, a few of whom were quiet men of business, while the others, nearly half of whom were anxious-eyed ladies who had reached middle life, seemed flushed and ill at ease as they perused and reperused the written and printed memoranda with which they all seemed to be provided, and glanced impatiently at the ornamental clock on its gilded bracket. The lawyer, as an *habitué* of the place, sent in his name, and gained speedy admittance to the inner den, where

Mr. Bales himself, tall, thin, and with a thatch of bushy eyebrows projecting in pent-house fashion over his steady blue eyes, held out a cool white hand to be grasped by the hot red hand of Mr. Wilkins.

The head of the firm of Bales and Beales was pre-eminently a cool man, and nothing could be in stronger contrast than was his unimpassioned bearing and the flutter and flurry of his customers.

"How about my Turks?" unceremoniously demanded Mr. Wilkins. "Of course I know they're down again—confound them!"

"The fall continues. They have receded, let me see, two and seven-eighths since this morning," returned the broker, pointing to the official bulletin in its frame on the wall beside him. "Probably they are falling as we speak, for the Bourses of Paris, Amsterdam, and Vienna opened heavily."



“ Well, you *are* a Job’s comforter, Bales,” said the lawyer, wiping his heated brow. “ Will this sort of thing go on, hey ? Shall I sell, or stick to my colours like a Briton ? Can’t you give a fellow your advice ? ”

“ I never advise,” answered Mr. Bales, with his cold smile. “ Life would be a burden to me if I did. I prefer to lay the facts before those who do me the favour to come to me, leaving to their unbiassed judgment the course to pursue. Here are some Stock Exchange telegrams, part of which you will see presently, no doubt, in the evening papers. They help to explain the rush on the part of the public to sell out.”

The attorney took the half-dozen square pieces of hastily-printed paper, yet damp from the press, some of them, which Mr.

Bales courteously proffered him, and at a glance mastered their contents.

“Can rascally fabrications like this,” asked the attorney, in a glow of something like honest indignation, “impose upon the veriest gull in Christendom?”

“Ah!” answered the unmoved Mr. Bales, scrutinising the despatch which his irate client held between his finger and thumb, “you mean the rumour about the sale of the six Turkish ironclads to the Russian government? Popular credulity, my dear sir, would swallow more than that. You have overlooked the other telegram, which mentions that Adamapoulos and Nikopolos, the Greek bankers of Galata, have declined to advance to the Porte at twenty per cent. the wherewithal to meet the next coupon of the Debt. That report has more weight with business-men than the nautical

one. Will you give me instructions to sell?"

"No; but to buy!" rapped out Mr. Wilkins, with suddenness. "There must come a reaction soon. I'll take another ten thousand of the Imperial Ottomans. I know what you would say, Bales," he added irritably: "the cash I left on deposit won't cover the margin. Here"—and he produced the bank-notes that had fallen to his share in the division of that day—"are funds, and to spare."

As the lawyer quitted the stock-broker's office he muttered between his set teeth: "I stand to win; but at any rate I know of back-play of a safer sort. Sir Sykes Denzil of Carbery, you are a sponge well worth the squeezing!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE STOLEN LETTER.

JASPER DENZIL, his arm, bruised and crushed as it had been beneath the weight of the fallen horse, still needing the support of a sling, and his pallid cheek and dim eye telling that he had not wholly regained his strength, lounged among the cushions of a sofa in what was called the White Room at Carbery. This room, which owed its name to the colour of its panelled walls, sparsely relieved by mouldings of gold and pale blue, overlooked the park and adjoined the billiard-room ; and Jasper, with an invalid's caprice, had chosen it for his especial apart-

ment during the period of his compulsory confinement to the house.

Time hung more heavily than ever on the captain's hands since his accident had cut him off from his ordinary habits of life. Of intellectual resources he had few indeed, being one of those men (and they are numerous amongst us) to whom reading is a weariness of spirit, and thinking a laborious mental process, and who undergo tortures of boredom when thrown helpless into that worst of all company—their own. His sisters' affection, his sisters' innocent anxiety to anticipate his wishes and soothe his pain, bored him more than it touched him. He was not of a tender moral fibre, and barely tolerated at best those of his own blood and name. He would very much have preferred as a nurse bluff Jack Prodgers, to Blanche and Lucy. With Prodgers he had topics

and interests in common; the minds of the two captains ran nearly in identical grooves; whereas his sisters did not fathom his nature or partake his tastes. So dreary was the existence to which this once brilliant cavalry officer was now condemned, that he had actually come to look forward with a sort of languid excitement to the professional visits of little Dr. Aulfus from Pebworth, whose gig, to the great disgust of Mr. Lancetter, the High Tor surgeon, was daily to be seen traversing the carriage-drive of Carbery Chase. With his father, Jasper's dealings were coldly decorous, no fondness and no trust existing on either side. Sir Sykes had announced to Jasper that his debts—of which the baronet, through a chance interview with Mr. Wilkins the attorney from London, had been made aware—had been paid in full.

"I must ask you, Jasper," Sir Sykes had said, "for two assurances: one to the effect that no more secret liabilities exist to start up at unexpected moments; and the other, that you will never again ride a steeple-chase."

"For my own sake, sir, I'll promise you that last willingly enough," said Jasper, with a sickly smile. "I didn't use to mind that kind of thing; but I suppose I am not so young in constitution as I was, and don't come up to time so readily. And as for more snakes in the grass, such as those which that impudent cur Wilkins wheedled me into signing, for his own benefit and that of his worthy allies, I give you my word there's not one. Some fresh tailor or liveryman may send a bill in one day. A gentleman can't always be quite sure as to how many new coats and hired broughams

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may be totted up against him by those harpies at the West End ; but that is all. I should have won a hatful of money the other day if anybody but Hanger had been on The Smasher's back, when that savage brute rushed at the wall ; but I don't owe any, except a hundred and fifty which Prodgers lent me, and every farthing of which I paid to the bookmakers before the race, in hope of receiving it back with a tidy sum to boot."

Sir Sykes had forthwith inclosed a cheque for a hundred and fifty pounds to Captain Prodgers, with a very frigid acknowledgment of the accommodation offered to his son.

"I could wish that you had other friends, other pursuits too," he said coldly to Jasper. "However, I will not lecture. You are of an age to select your own associates."



Captain Denzil then, being on terms of chilling civility with his father, and an uncongenial companion for his sisters, yielded himself the more readily to the singular fascination which Ruth Willis could, when she chose, exert. Sir Sykes's ward had a remarkable power of pleasing when it suited her to please. She had at the first conciliated the servants at Carbery—no slight feat, considering the dull weight of stolid prejudice which she had to encounter—and had won the regard of the baronet's two daughters. Then Lucy and Blanche had felt the ardour of their early girlish friendship for the Indian orphan cool perceptibly, perhaps because the latter no longer gave herself the same pains to win their suffrages. And now she laid herself out to be agreeable to Jasper. Nothing could be more natural or befitting than that

a young lady, under deep obligations to the master of the house, should shew her gratitude by doing little acts of kindness to her guardian's son when a prisoner; and without any apparent effort or design, Ruth seemed to appropriate the invalid as her own. She talked to him—she was by far better informed than the average of her sex and age, and had a rare tact which taught her when to speak, and of what—and she read to him. A more fastidious listener than Jasper might have been charmed with that sweet untiring voice, so admirably modulated that it assumed the tone most suited to the subject-matter, be it what it might. The captain, whose boast it was, that with the exception of racing calendars and cavalry manuals, he had not opened a book since he left school, cared for nothing but newspapers, and especially newspapers of a

sporting turn, and such literature is not generally very inviting to a feminine student; but Miss Willis shewed no symptoms of weariness as she retailed to her hearer the cream of the turf intelligence.

"I don't half like her. There are times when I could almost say, I hate her!" thought Jasper to himself once and again; "but she's clever, and has something about her which I don't understand, for she never bores a fellow."

It was a burning day in early August. The windows of the White Room were open, and the heavy hum of the bees, as they loaded themselves with the plunder of the blossoms that clustered so thickly without, had in itself a drowsy potency. Jasper, overcome by heat and lassitude, had fallen asleep among his cushions, and Ruth Willis, who had been reading to him, laid down the

paper and slipped softly from the room, closing the door behind her. She met no one, either on her way to her own chamber or as, having donned her garden hat and jacket, she descended the stairs. It was her practice on most fine days to leave the house for a solitary ramble either in the park or among the woods that sloped down to the river.

It was Ruth's custom, when thus she sallied forth alone, to take with her a book, which she could read when seated on some granite boulder against which the swift stream chafed in vain, or amidst the gnarled roots of the ancient trees in the Chase. Nor did she, like the majority of young ladies, consider nothing worth her study save the contents of the last green box of novels from a London circulating library, preferring often the perusal of the

quaint pretty old books that are usually allowed to sleep unmolested on their shelves, here the verses of a forgotten poet, there perhaps some idyl unsurpassed in its simple sweetness of thought and diction.

With works of this description, well chosen once but now voted obsolete, the library at Carbery Chase was richly stored; and Sir Sykes had willingly given to his ward the permission which she asked, to have free access to its treasures. He himself spent most of his time while within doors in this same library, and there Ruth fully expected to find him, when she entered it, accoutred for her walk. She had in her hand a tiny tome, bound in tawny leather, and with a faded coat of arms, on which might still be deciphered the De Vere wyverns stamped upon the cover. To replace this and to select another volume, she should have to

pass Sir Sykes's writing-table, in front of the great stained glass window : but he would merely look up with a nod and smile as the small slender form of his ward flitted by.

Sir Sykes, however, contrary to his habit at that hour, was not in the library. He must but recently have quitted it, however, for the ink in the pen that he had laid aside was yet wet, and the note which he had been engaged in writing was unfinished. On a desk which occupied the right-hand corner of the writing-table, a large old desk, the queer inlaid work of which, in ivory and tortoise-shell, had probably been that of some Chinese or Hindu mechanic, lay an open letter, the bluish paper and formal penmanship of which suggested the idea of business. Now, it may seem trite to say that a regard for the sanctity of another person's correspondence is not merely innate

in every honourable mind, but so strongly inculcated upon us by education and example, that there are many who are capable of actual crime, yet who would be degraded in their own esteem by any prying into what was meant to meet no eyes but those of the legitimate recipient. Yet Ruth Willis, the instant that she perceived herself to be alone in the room, unhesitatingly drew near to the table and took a brief survey of what lay upon it. As she caught a glimpse of the letter, her very breathing seemed to stop, and a strange glittering light came into her large eyes, and a crimson flush mantled in her pale cheek.

“I must have it!” she exclaimed passionately. “At any risk I must know all, must realise the extent of the danger, and whence it threatens. There is not a moment to lose!”

Quick as thought the girl snatched up the letter from the desk on which it lay, and darted towards the French window nearest to the now empty fire-place. The window stood open. As she neared it, she heard a man's tread in the passage, a man's hand upon the door of the library. To avoid detection, her only chance was in her own promptitude and coolness. She had but just time to pass through the opening and to conceal herself among the rose-trees and flowering shrubs, before Sir Sykes entered the room that she had so lately left. She thrust the letter into her pocket and cowered down close to the wall, terror in her eyes and quick-moving lips, for she knew but too well that, in such a case as this, no social subterfuge, no fair seeming excuse could avail her.

From her lair among the fragrant bushes



Ruth could see the baronet tossing over the papers that lay neatly arranged on his table, then hurrying to and fro in evident excitement. That he was seeking for the missing letter was clear.

“Sooner or later,” she murmured to herself, “he *must* remember the window, and should he but see me, all is lost. In such a plight, boldness is safest.”

With a stealthy swiftness which had something feline in it, Ruth Willis made her way past shrubs and sheltering trees and black hedges of aged yew, trimmed, for generations past, by the gardener's shears. There were men at work among the lawns and flower-beds, men at work too among the hot-houses and conservatories. It would not be well, should suspicion be rife and inquiry active, that these men should have seen her. There was one place, however, where the

trees of the garden overhung the fence dividing it from the park, and here there was a wicket, seldom used. To reach it she had to traverse one short stretch of greensward exposed to the observation of the under-gardeners at their work. Watching for a favourable moment, Ruth glided across the dangerous piece of open ground, unseen by those who were busy at that mowing and rolling, and weeding and pruning, which never seem to be finished in a rich man's pleasaunce. With the speed of a hunted deer she threaded her way amidst the trees, opened the gate, and skirting the southern angle of the park, fled through the new plantations to her favourite resort, the woods beside the river.

No more peaceful and few prettier spots could easily have been found than that which Ruth now sought, a place where the

swift stream, rushing down from its birth-place among the Dartmoor heights to end its short career in the blue sea—of which, between the interlacing boughs, a view could here and there be obtained—brawled among the red rocks that half choked up the deep and narrow ravine. A welcome coolness seemed to arise from where the spray of the pellucid water was sprinkled over boulders worn smooth by time; and clefts where the delicate lady-fern and many another dainty frond grew thickly. But Ruth Willis for once was blind to the beauty of the scene, deaf to the silvery music of the stream among the pebbles or to the carol of the birds. With dilated eyes and lips compressed, but with trembling fingers, she drew forth the stolen letter, and beneath the shadow of the overhanging boughs, eagerly, almost fiercely, read and re-read the words that it contained.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### LIFTS A CORNER OF THE MASK.

RUTH WILLIS bending forward, her gloved fingers clasped upon the open letter that she held, and her pale face on fire, as it were, with eager passion, seemed sadly out of tune with the still beauty of that silvan spot, where first the crystal Start, freed from its moorland cradle, gushed forth as a real river, although of puny dimensions, bearing its watery tribute to the sea. Above, arched the feathery larch, the slender hazel, and the tapering ash. Branches of the mountain-ash projected like the stone frettings of some medieval belfry. The clear sweet warble of mavis

and merle came throbbing softly to the ear from the dim green heart of the summer woodlands. The letter which she had purloined—the theft may have been prompted by the impulse of the moment, and it is charitable to hope that such deeds were new to her—was now hers, to peruse at her leisure. She read it then, did Ruth Willis, again and again, slowly and deliberately, scanning and weighing every word, as though she had been a student of the cuneiform character, puzzling out Babylonian tablets by the aid of vague and tentative keys to the long-dead language of which they bore the impress.

The letter ran thus :

*8, Bond's Chambers,  
St. Nicholas Poultney, London.*

DEAR SIR SYKES—It might be as well perhaps that we should come to an under-

standing at once respecting the business on which I spoke to you at the *De Vere Arms* some days since. I do not know whether you are aware that I hold evidence substantiating the entire circumstances of the case, which I could at any time reveal. I will mention no names of place or person, since this is unwelcome to you ; but in return for my consideration for your interests, and for those whose prosperity and good name are *now* knit up in yours, I consider myself to possess a claim upon your confidence. I therefore permit myself to think that as your legal adviser I could conduct your affairs so that you should be under no apprehension for the future, provided always that the entire management (professionally) of your estate and property should be placed in my hands. This, after due consideration, I think would be the most expedient manner of settling matters for the advantage of all parties concerned.

Trusting that you may see this arrange-

ment in the same light as myself, and that it may meet with your approval, as the only means of arriving at a definite understanding, I shall await your reply. I beg to remain, my dear sir, very obediently and faithfully yours,

ENOCH WILKINS, *Solicitor*.

Such was the letter which Sir Sykes Denzil had unguardedly left upon his library table; and it may be admitted that a more impudent epistle has rarely been addressed to a gentleman of equal station to that of the proprietor of Carbery. It was difficult at first sight to believe that a demand so audacious in itself, and so offensively urged, could be intended as anything else than a sorry jest. Yet that the writer was quite in earnest, nay more, that he felt himself assured of not craving in vain for the coveted boon, was

palpable to so attentive a critic as was Ruth Willis.

“If any man had dared to write thus to me,” she said, slowly hissing out the words between her half-shut teeth, “and I had filled the position held by yonder pompous dolt, I would have—ay, given him cause to repent it.”

And the lurid light that glimmered in her dark eyes, and the hardening of her shrewd pale face until it seemed as though of chiselled marble rather than sentient flesh, and the swift and sudden gesture with which she raised and shook her clenched hand, as though it held a dagger—these signs were the revelation of a fierce and unscrupulous nature, kept down by the pressure of circumstances, but ready at pinch of need to flame forth, as the hot lava bubbles and seethes beneath the crust of



cold ashes in which the vines of the Italian peasant have struck root.

Again and with deliberate care did the baronet's ward read the letter through. Then she refolded it and replaced it in her pocket, and then consulted her watch. Only a few minutes had as yet elapsed since her escape—for it was little else—from the mansion.

"I must not go back as yet," she said thoughtfully. "By this time the whole household will be astir like a hive of angry bees, if, as is all but certain, Sir Sykes has not had self-control enough to keep his own counsel as to the loss he has sustained. He should have burned this choice epistle the moment he had made himself master of its purport; but he is of that order of men who treasure up the very proofs that sooner or later overwhelm them with a weight of

silent evidence. Was it not the learned forger, silver-tongued, plausible Dr. Dodd, who was left alone with the fatal document that brought him to the gallows, alone in a room where a brisk fire was blazing? One flash of mother-wit, one motion of the hand, and nothing but a heap of tinder would have remained to bear witness of the fraud. But no! The doomed wretch waited, passive, for the hangman's fingers to adjust the hempen noose about his miserable neck. So would not I!"

Again the girl glanced impatiently at her watch.

"How Time lags!" she exclaimed petulantly, as she marked the slow crawling of the thin black minute-hand around the dial; "heeding nothing, influenced by nothing, inexorable in his measured pace. It is a pain to such as I am to be forced

to loiter here inactive, when there is a foe to cope with, a peril to avert."

She said no more, but paced restlessly to and fro along the river-bank, beneath the arching boughs; with somewhat of the air and tread of a caged panther wearing away the sullen hours of captivity behind the restraining bars. Her very step had in it somewhat of the litheness which we notice in the movements of the savage, and the working of her keen features told how deeply her busy brain was pondering on the events of the day. Ruth's face, when once it was withdrawn from the observation of others, was a singularly expressive one. When she had left the room wherein Jasper had fallen asleep among his pillows, the countenance of Sir Sykes's ward had been eloquent with weariness and contempt. Now it told of resentment restrained, but only in part

restrained, by a caution that was rather of habit than of instinct.

“An hour more! yet an hour,” said the girl at length, again looking at her watch, and then she stood leaning against the tough stem of a quivering mountain-ash that almost overhung the brawling torrent. She still kept in her left hand the book which she had had with her when entering the library at Carbery; but even had not the volume been one which she had lately perused, she was in no mood for reading. Manifestly her mind was shaping out some desperate resolution.

“I will do it!” she said at last, lifting her head with a defiant glitter in her lustrous eyes; “before I sleep it shall be written. I know and gauge beforehand the risk of such a course; know too that I am loosening my own grasp on the helm if I invite

another to aid me. But that is better than to be foiled at the outset, and after weeks spent in this self-schooling, and in the sickening task of cajoling a shallow, knavish egotist, such as the future Sir Jasper will be until his dying day. Let those look to it who for their own schemes venture to cross my path !”

The hour, however slowly it might appear to pass in the estimation of one whose nerves were on fire with excitement, nevertheless did wear itself out, and there was an end of waiting. With tranquil step and unruffled brow, Sir Sykes's ward returned to her guardian's house, to find, as she had anticipated, confusion and dismay prevalent there ; the servants sullen or clamorous, the baronet's daughters distressed, and Sir Sykes himself in a state of feverish suspicion, which almost made him forget the traditions of good-breeding.

"Do you, Miss Willis, know anything of this?" he asked half rudely, the instant that he caught sight of his ward.

"I — know of what?" returned Ruth innocently, as she lifted her eyes, with a startled look, to his.

"You forget, papa," said Lucy Denzil, almost indignantly, "that Ruth has heard of nothing. She was away from the house all the time."

"Yes, yes; I beg pardon of course," exclaimed the baronet reddening, but still fixing his eyes searchingly on the placid face of his ward.

The Indian orphan bore his scrutiny with an admirable composure. Her lower lip trembled a little, as was natural, when she turned towards Lucy. "Pray do tell me," she said, "what has happened? for it really does seem as though I had been unfor-

tunate enough to make Sir Sykes angry with me."

"Papa has lost a letter — a letter of importance," said Lucy, blushing as she spoke ; "and as the servants deny all knowledge of it, and its loss"—

"Say theft, not loss!" interrupted the baronet with unwonted harshness. "I make no doubt that the letter was stolen from my desk in the library, on which I had left it for but some two minutes, while I went to speak with my son in the White Room. The French window nearest to the fire-place was open, giving an easy means of entry, as of egress, for the purloiner of this letter, who must have been on the watch for an opportunity of surprising my secrets—that is to say," stammered Sir Sykes, who felt the imprudence of these last words—"of basely prying into my private correspondence."

“Are you quite, quite sure, papa dear,” pleaded Blanche, “that you left the letter there, instead of bestowing it in some safe place for safe keeping, which may afterwards have escaped your memory, and will presently be recollected? Such things have happened often and often, even to the most methodical, and ”——

“There, there, my girl!” broke in the baronet peevishly. “Have I not heard that argument repeated *ad nauseam* by every man and maid that I have questioned; and is it not the stock answer to all inquiries after missing trinkets or valuables unaccounted for? I grant that I can prove nothing. If I could ”——

He did not complete the sentence, but crushing down the wrath that almost choked his voice, turned away. Nothing, at this unpleasant conjuncture, could be in better



taste, or more simple, than Ruth's demeanour. She began to cry. It was the first time since the day of her arrival that any one at Carbery had seen her in tears, and now both Blanche and Lucy came kindly to kiss her and console her with whispered entreaties to excuse Sir Sykes for an indiscriminate anger which there was much to palliate. But Ruth soon dried her eyes, and going up to her guardian laid her hand upon his arm and looked up timidly in his face.

"Let me be useful," she said. "Let me help in hunting high and low for this letter; pray, pray do, dear Sir Sykes, you who have been so very, very kind to me since I have been here."

Nothing could be prettier. And Sir Sykes, though in his present irritable condition he actually shuddered at her light touch upon his arm, as though he had been

in contact with a snake, was compelled to say a word or two of apology.

"I am greatly annoyed," he said awkwardly, "and have been unjust and inhospitable, I fear, and must ask you to forget my rudeness. I am best alone."

Sir Sykes therefore withdrew, and for some time was seen no more; while Jasper, who had been an amused spectator of the turmoil, sauntered back to the White Room, muttering as he went: "Lucky, rather, that this child had so perfect an alibi, or the governor would have tried, convicted, and sentenced his only son and heir as the light-fingered captor of his lost property. A new sensation, it strikes me, that of injured innocence. And talking of that—how nicely Miss Ruth, be she who she may, played her part—not one bit overdone—it was perfect! We breathe here an atmosphere of mystery;

but it will be strange if, when I am all right again, I do not make a push to get at the governor's secret, whatever it may be."

The letter, it need hardly be said, remained undiscovered by the volunteer searchers who undertook the quest of it; but gradually the indignant household became more calm, and the general voice confirmed the comfortable opinion, that Sir Sykes had unwittingly locked up the missing document in some desk or drawer, whence it would one day be satisfactorily extracted.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### AT OLD PLUGGER'S.

LONDON boarding-houses being regulated by no statute law, and as little liable to the supervision of the police and the interference of the Right Honourable the Secretary of State for the Home Department as are other free commercial concerns, are very much harder to classify than are London hotels, inns, and public-houses. Their very exterior, which is decorated by no gaudy signs or gold-lettered inscriptions relative to viands, neat wines or cordials, might cause them to be mistaken for schools, workshops, or private dwellings. Even when a brass plate on the

door bears the name of Bloss or Grewer or Pawkins—people who keep boarding-houses do appear, for some inscrutable reason, to parade the oddest patronymics—nobody not enlightened enough to know who Pawkins, Bloss, or Grewer may be, would gather much information from the laconic announcement. In all London there was not, taking one place with another, a much queerer boarding-house than one which stood on the Southwark or Surrey side of the Thames, and so nearly opposite to the Tower that the gaunt turrets of the grim old fortress were always (save in a fog of peculiar density) visible from its upper windows. This boarding-house, at the corner of what was called Dampier's Row, was very solidly built, chiefly, as it would seem, of the massive timbers of ships dissected in the breakers' yards close by; and with its bow-windows

and bulging outline, seemed to stand hard by the water's edge, like some sturdy collier craft that had accidentally got stranded and was trying to accustom itself to life ashore. This particular boarding-house, the green door of which bore no distinguishing mark, was known in the neighbourhood and far along the river below bridge, as 'Old Plugger's.'

Whether there was a Plugger still in existence or not, it may be surmised that the original and veteran possessor of that name had enjoyed a wide-spread connection among mariners, for most of the present inmates of the house were seafaring persons. Most, but not all. And of the nautical boarders at Plugger's none were common seamen. The title of 'Captain' was in as constant requisition within its weather-bleached porch, overgrown with scarlet-

runners, as it could possibly be at a military club farther west. Two-thirds of the swarthy, restless-eyed customers claimed to have a right to that honorary prefix, or at the least to have been 'officers' of one branch or another of the mercantile marine. The remainder, apparently attracted to the spot by the smell of the tar and paint from the neighbouring wharfs, or by the sight of the forest of masts that rose up between them and the Middlesex shore, or by congenial company, had much to say as to gulches and placers and auriferous river-bars, and gold-dust which, after months of toil and hunger, had been fooled away in a week's mad revel ; and colossal fortunes that could infallibly be realised by any one who had a pitiful thousand pounds at command, and would be guided by sound advice as to its investment.

It was not a cheap boarding-house, accord-

ing to the tariff of such establishments, this one of Old Plugger's. Rivals and humbler imitators held it in respect, for it was a thriving concern. Its rooms seldom stood empty for long, and its frequenters somehow found the wherewithal to pay their score. It was not a noisy place; by no means comparable to the riotous den about Tiger Bay and elsewhere, or to the sailors' public at Wapping or Rotherhithe; but now and then there was a din from within it, a shouting of hoarse voices, a trampling of heavy feet, a crashing of woodwork or of glass, and then silence. And if just then a patrol of the police happened to be passing down the main street, and some one said that the disturbance was at Old Plugger's, the sergeant would shake his head as meaningly as Lord Burleigh in the *Critic*. But nobody seemed to care to inquire



too curiously into the nature of the altercation in what was euphemistically known, among the trades-folk of the vicinity, as the captains' boarding-house.

It was, as has been said with reference to contemporary events at Carbery, sultry August weather, and if it was hot even on the spurs of breezy Dartmoor, assuredly it was hotter in the east of London. The strong sun brought out with great effect the combined perfumes of pitch and paint, of gas refuse and train-oil, of tide-mud and fried flat-fish, of old tarpaulins, rotten timber, and animal and vegetable refuse, never so pungent as beside the Thames. Society, grasping for air of purer quality than that town-made article which during the season and the parliamentary session it had respired perforce, had left London. But the captains who patronised Plugger's bore

the loss of Society with philosophical equanimity, and were content to incur, by stopping where they were, a reputation for being wholly unfashionable.

A controversy might have been waged with reference to Old Plugger's as to which was the back and which the front of that hospitable mansion. The main-door certainly opened on the street, or rather row, named in honour of Dampier, and by the position of a main-door that of a house-front is commonly to be determined. But then Plugger's turned all its smiles, all its attractions towards the river. The best rooms were on that side, with their bow-windows and lumbering balconies; and there was even a narrow strip of garden, where snails ran riot among the neglected cabbages and tall sunflowers, and where the half of an old boat, set on end and festooned with sweet-

pea and the inevitable scarlet-runner, did duty for an arbour, perilously near to the wash and ripple of the flood-tide.

In the broad wooden balcony that projected from the low first-floor of Plugger's and in part overhung this delectable garden, were some six or seven men in their shirt sleeves, mostly, for coolness' sake, but otherwise not ill clad. Through the open bow-windows of the long room of which the balcony was an appendage, glimpses might be caught of some ten or twelve other customers, very similar in garb and bearing to those outside. It was early as yet, and breakfast—as betokened by the empty cups, empty bottles, and confusion of knives and forks and dirty plates—was already over. Some of the company were smoking a solemn morning pipe of the yard-long 'churchwarden' variety, affected by sea-

going persons when on shore ; two seated at a round-table were engaged in a game at cards ; and one copper-visaged and gray-haired captain, with a glass of steaming rum-and-water at his elbow, sat on the flat top of the wooden balustrade itself, and alternately swept the waters with the aid of a gleaming brass-bound telescope, or glanced critically at the cards and the players. In all this there was nothing to distinguish Plugger's from many another long-shore boarding-house, wherein mates and skippers take their spell of rest, as it were, between the hardships of the last voyage and those of the next ; and those who have seen much of men of this class are aware how much of sterling worth is apt to underlie the harmless peculiarities traditional to the calling. But a physiognomist who should have, himself unseen,

accompanied some Asmodeus bent on taking a bird's-eye view of the company, could scarcely have failed to draw his own deductions from the countenances thus beheld. There were faces there in plenty which would have seemed in keeping with their surroundings had they been seen above the bulwarks of a long, black-hulled schooner, rakish as to her masts, and clean and sharp as to her run and cut-water, beating to windward off the Isle of Pines, or within sight of the mountain mass of Cuba. There were others, newly shaven, that would have harmonised well with a shaggy beard and tattered cabbage-palm hat, surmounting the red shirt and pistol-studded belt of the Australian bushranger. And again, others which might be conceived to have been tanned to their mahogany hue by the reflection of the sun from the tawny

surface of some African river, where, behind the mangrove swamp, might be seen the cane-thatched top of the barracoon, where the cargo of 'live ebony' lay shackled. A very dangerous set of scamps, unless their looks belied them, were the bulk of Plugger's patrons, and the more dangerous perhaps because they were not reckless—because they knew how to abstain from the overdose of liquor that sets the brain afloat and loosens the tongue.

"Let me tell yew, mister, yew'd be riddled, yew would, like any catamount treed, ef yew played thet sorter game in Georgia, whar I war raised, yew would," suddenly exclaimed one of the card-players, whose nasal drawl would of itself have revealed his nationality. "Thet's three times I've seen yew try to pass the king."

"Don't cry afore you're hurt," retorted his

adversary, whose air and tone were those of a sailor, and whose muscular wrists, emerging from shirt-cuffs linked by heavy sleeve-buttons of silver, were ornamented by mermaids and anchors and true-lovers' knots in blue tattooing of the true salt-water pattern. "Guess this child wasn't born last week, shipmate! Haven't I sported the paste-board at New York with Dead Rabbits; at New Orleans with Plug-uglies; and in California with fellows that stuck the points of their bowies in the table afore they set to a hand at poker! You're a nice hand to tax a man with cheating, you, with two court cards up your sleeve now!"

The American, who was spare and lightly built, compared with the opposite player, scowled as he thrust his bony right hand into an inner pocket of the loose coat which

he alone of all the occupants of the balcony wore. It may have been for the concealment of the cards alluded to; it may have been to get a grasp of some hidden weapon. The latter was the supposition that the most commended itself to the other gamester.

“Shew your hand, Sam Barks!” he said roughly, grasping a Dutch bottle, probably containing Schiedam, which stood in company with two glasses on the table, “or I”——

“Belay there, you brace of babies!” interrupted the copper-visaged captain, thrusting his flashing telescope and his metallic face betwixt the disputants. “Dog don’t eat dog, my mates! I always was agin play between friends.—Sam, my lad, you won’t make much out of Captain Hold.—Dick, my Trojan, you’ll not find the American quite as green as spinach. Draw



your stakes, my heroes, and let's shake hands and have a drink all round, for the renewal of friendship!" And this singular specimen of a peacemaker flourished his glass, swallowed its contents, and rattled the teaspoon against its sides until this substitute for a bell attracted the notice of a watchful attendant, wearing a striped cotton jacket, such as cabin-boys in hot latitudes affect.

"Three grogs, steward, and a goodish squeeze of lemon in mine, d'ye hear?" called out he of the copper countenance; and the dark-skinned mulatto lad who was called 'steward,' as factotums in *The Traveller's Rest* were called Deputy, nodded his woolly head, and was not long in bringing the desired refreshment. The kettle must have been kept always boiling, even on hot August mornings, at Plugger's, so

ready was the supply of steaming spirits and water.

"Ah! my boys," said the venerable founder of the feast, as he took a second sip at the potent liquor, "here's a blue blazing day for ye—puts me in mind, and you too mayhap, of a morning in the doldrums, where sun is sun, and the very sea seems to simmer like a can of hot broth. I'd like to smell blue water again, I would. I'd an offer, Monday, to command a decentish brig, West Ingies and Demerary way; regular molasses wagon; but old as I am, I'd rather have another bout in the South Seas. Black-birding for the Fiji and Queensland labour market is about the best sport a man can have, since they spoiled the fun we used to have off the West Coast."

"Ay, but that game's pretty near played out too," answered Hold medita-

tively. "Why, you yourself, Captain Grincher, lost your schooner that the man-o'-war captured off the Solomons, and were tried at Sydney for what the government fellows called kidnapping. No; give me Chinese waters, and a handy crew aboard a bit of a fast-sailing lorch to"—

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" broke in the American, now in a good temper; "allow me to say it air a pity to see men of your talents a-huddling of 'em into corners wheer they'll fail of their just reward. Now, listen, ef I could but get together a few spirited citizens and, mind ye, the handful of coin necessary for preliminary expenses, this child could point the place where lies, in fourteen fathom water, the treasure-ship *Happy Land* that left San Francisco, bound for New York, in the fall of '49,

and never was heard of more. She had the value, in dust and bars, of"——

But the precise amount of the golden freight which, on board the *Happy Land*, awaited the bold explorers who should reach that sunken vessel, is not destined to be set down in these pages, for the coloured steward at this juncture appeared holding a letter between his dusky finger and thumb. "For Cap'en Hold," said the mulatto; and Hold, recognising the handwriting, jumped to his feet in a trice, and snatched rather than received the envelope which the dark Ganymede of Plugger's held out to him; and tearing it open, read as follows: "Come, and come at once. There is no time to lose. Something has occurred—something which makes your presence necessary. Come by noonday train. I will be at the park gate to the north soon

after ten o'clock. Meet me there." The letter was signed "Ruth Willis."

Hold's mind was instantly made up. "I must heave anchor in a hurry," he said, as he thrust back the letter into his pocket. "So good-bye, Grincher; and good-bye, Barks!" and without further delay, he withdrew to prepare for the journey to Carbery. To pay his reckoning, to push some needful articles into a bag, and to consign his sea-chest to the custody of the authorities of Plugger's, well used to similar trusts, took but half-an-hour; and when the mid-day train started for the West of England it carried with it a second-class passenger, whose only luggage was a black bag, and who could easily have been mistaken for a man-o'-war's man bound for Plymouth, there to rejoin one of those *Hornets* or *Monkeys* which

have superseded the *Arethusas* and *Hermiones* of the past.

Arrived at the station most convenient for his purpose, Hold trudged sturdily on until he reached his old quarters, at *The Traveller's Rest*, where he installed his bag in one of those single-bedded rooms which were always at the service of so solvent a customer as Mr. Hold, who, while inland and among shore-going folks, dropped his titular distinction of captain. After supper, the fresh arrival at *The Rest* sallied forth, and making his way to Carbery, waited, pacing softly to and fro, under the shelter of the park wall.

END OF VOL. I.









